

JOYCE *of the* **SECRET SQUADRON**



JOYCE RYAN
as she appears in the radio series

A CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT
Adventure





JOYCE

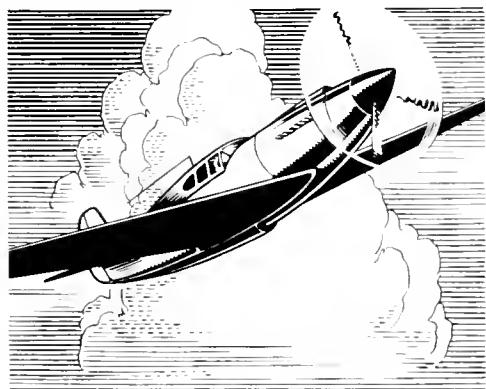
of the
Secret Squadron

A Captain Midnight Adventure

By R. R. WINTERBOTHAM

Based on the Famous Radio Series
"Captain Midnight"

As members of the world-famous Secret Squadron, Joyce Ryan and her close friends, Captain Midnight and Chuck Ramsay, are stationed at a secret air base in the South Pacific. The evil Barracuda and his international spy ring again exchange blows with Captain Midnight in the search for the Flying Wing.



Captain Midnight's career began on the radio several years ago and his adventures in all corners of the world have been covered in comics magazines and an adventure newspaper strip.

Ichabod Mudd, Captain Midnight's close friend and better known as "Ikky," has been his constant companion in many thrilling adventures.

WHITMAN PUBLISHING CO.

RACINE, WISCONSIN







375

Joyce of the Secret Squadron

A CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT Adventure

By R. R. WINTERBOTHAM

Illustrated by
ERWIN L. DARWIN

Authorized Edition
Based on the Famous Radio Series
"CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT"



WHITMAN PUBLISHING COMPANY
RACINE, WISCONSIN

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is entirely coincidental.*

[The jacket photo of JOYCE RYAN, as she
appears in the CAPTAIN MIDNIGHT
radio series, is by Maurice Seymour, Chicago]

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER	PAGE
I A Task for the Secret Squadron	II
II The Barracuda	27
III A Deepening Mystery	39
IV A Polite Third Degree	53
V The Flying Spy	67
VI Renewing an Old Acquaintance	83
VII Diamond Cut Diamond	97
VIII Word From the Lost Agent	III
IX Birds of an Unpleasant Feather	125
X A Disturbing Discovery	139
XI A Request With a Catch	152
XII The Puzzle of the Castaway	168
XIII A Sinister Visitor	182
XIV Mischief Afoot	196
XV The Consequences of Wrath	210
XVI From an Unexpected Quarter	224
XVII For the Final Report	237

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LIST OF ILLUSTRATIONS

	PAGE
The Leader Was Known as Captain Midnight	10
"Joyce! I Thought She Was at Headquarters."	25
"What's Up, Captain Midnight?" Asked Joyce	41
"Captain Midnight!" Carson Exclaimed in Surprise ..	55
There Was the Ship of the Barracuda	71
"A Pleasant Little Place!" Joyce Exclaimed	85
"Yes, Chuck, I'm Sure That Joyce Is Right."	101
"News From SS-43!" Chuck Exclaimed	113
"Something Hit Those Trees," Joyce Said	123
"Do Not Try to Double-Cross Me," Said the Barracuda	137
"Captain Midnight!" Joyce Exclaimed. "Look!" ..	153
"Do You Intend to Remain on the Island?"	165
"Listen! Someone Is Starting the Plane."	171
"What D'ya Wanna Do? Get Drilled?"	187
At Last, Panting, They Reached the Top	208
"You Don't Want No Part of the Pearls?"	220
Captain Burly and Captain Midnight Led the Way ..	238
The Schooner Sailed to the Southwest	246



The Leader Was Known as Captain Midnight

JOYCE OF THE SECRET SQUADRON

CHAPTER ONE

A TASK FOR THE SECRET SQUADRON

Almost lost in the great ocean expanse of the central Pacific is a small island which is not found on commercial maps. South of Hawaii and north of Palmyra, it is somewhat to the east of the Honolulu-Sydney steamship lane, and therefore wholly unimportant in ordinary times.

But these were not ordinary times. These were days of war—of violence and destruction and world-wide struggle for the right to be free. Islands forgotten in peacetime suddenly became strategic bases in war. Thus this small, flat expanse of coral sand, officially known as No. 542, and two or three neighboring atolls, once regarded only as dangers to navigation, were now serving vitally in the war effort of the United States and its Allies.

No. 542 was the headquarters of the Secret Squadron in the Pacific. Once uninhabited, it now was populated by an unofficial organization that served as an auxiliary intelligence and air arm for the United States. Composed

of pilots formerly aces of the First World War, it was headed by that mysterious and intrepid leader known as Captain Midnight.

A row of small houses surrounded by bunkers to protect them from bomb splinters, several similarly protected workshops, and a recently constructed landing field for airplanes, had been built on the isle. Anti-aircraft defenses were strong and an old merchant ship, converted into an aircraft carrier, was anchored in the small lagoon.

Dispersion hangars on the isle were expertly camouflaged, and the island itself was so flat and low that ships might pass within a few miles without perceiving any sign of its existence.

Aircraft serving the Secret Squadron was of all types —fast, speedy and light models. The largest was the bi-motored amphibian, Captain Midnight's personal ship, which had a long range and quarters for a crew of four or five. There were also numerous light bombers, many pursuit craft and some scout planes.

Above the building which served as Captain Midnight's headquarters stretched the wires of a radio aerial.

From this at six-hour intervals came the Secret Squadron reports and orders in a complex code that defied solution without the aid of a device known as the Secret Squadron Codograph, which each member carried as a part of his identification.

The staff headquarters building was unpretentious. In

the radio room was SS-11, known to his friends as Agent Kelly, a taciturn son of Erin who handled a radio as a maestro directs a symphony. In the mechanical department was Captain Midnight's old friend, Ichabod Mudd, a wizard with tools, whose philosophical observations, if not weighty, were at least unique.

"Now my idea on this daylight-saving stuff," Ikky observed at the beginning of the war, "is to make every year a leap year until the war is over. That way we can gain a day a year."

Jenkins supervised the inspection and packing of parachutes. In a tower above the building were a flight officer who directed the landing and take-off of Secret Squadron planes, and assistants with listening devices who watched for signs of enemy aircraft.

Captain Midnight occupied a private office just off the radio room. Near him in another private room sat his two friends, Chuck Ramsay and Joyce Ryan, who had been loyal companions through many adventures of the Secret Squadron leader.

Chuck, too young to be called for duty in the U. S. armed forces, was seeing more action than many older men who had been in the war since before the dastardly Jap attack on Pearl Harbor. As for Joyce, she had never been known to fail when courage and resourcefulness were needed.

Captain Midnight, alone, was busily studying Secret Squadron reports when a small buzzer broke the silence

in his office. The Secret Squadron leader flipped a small switch on his intercommunication phone.

"Yes, SS-18?" he inquired of an assistant in the outer office.

A clear voice came over the speaker.

"Something very irregular has happened, sir. A strange airplane just landed on the field. The pilot was taken into custody by the guards."

"I heard no firing," Captain Midnight commented.

"Gunners held their fire, sir. The plane bore American markings."

"Where's this pilot now?"

"In the waiting room outside your office. He is under guard."

"Very well. Let him wait a moment."

Captain Midnight switched off the phone. He rose from his chair and went to a panel in the wall. At the touch of a button at its side, the opaque panel instantly became transparent, for it was made of specially treated glass. To the man in the next room the panel appeared only as a mirror, but the chemically processed surface was transparent for light rays in one direction so that Captain Midnight could study those who waited to see him, without being seen himself.

Switching off the observation panel, Captain Midnight shook his head. The strange pilot apparently was not known to him. The Secret Squadron leader strode back to his telephone, his lean face serious in thought. His

long arm reached to the switch.

"Hello, SS-18."

"Yes, sir!" came the instant reply.

"Did this strange pilot have any credentials?"

"No, Captain Midnight. He demanded to be conducted to you at once. He would not reveal his errand."

This was extraordinary. Captain Midnight had chosen the members of his Secret Squadron carefully, and those acquainted with the methods of the organization knew that important information rarely needed to be divulged directly to the leader. Even the youngest agent had orders for clearing information through the headquarters staff, and anything important ultimately reached Captain Midnight after it had been duly sifted and appraised.

"Did he ask for me by name?" Captain Midnight inquired, probing for a key that would unlock the secret of the visitor's identity.

"He did, sir," SS-18 replied. "He asked to see *Captain Midnight*."

"So he knows who I am. Very well, I'll see him. Send him in."

"Yes, sir."

Captain Midnight switched off and sat down in his chair. The door facing him opened to admit an agent escorting a man dressed in civilian clothes who carried a brief case. The newcomer was rather short and he wore glasses. An air of dignity distinguished his manner, and his sharp eyes were shrewdly appraising Cap-

tain Midnight even as the Secret Squadron leader alertly inspected the newcomer.

"Gentleman to see you, sir," the agent announced from the doorway.

"Very good."

Captain Midnight raised his hand as a signal and the agent left the room, closing the door behind him. Thereupon Midnight addressed the visitor:

"Will you step forward, sir?"

"Thank you!" The mysterious pilot advanced to the desk. "You are Captain Midnight, I presume?"

Without answering, Captain Midnight began questioning the man before him.

"How did you find your way here?"

For reply, the stranger slipped his hand into the brief case and pulled forth a map.

"I was given this chart and told to destroy it after I arrived."

Captain Midnight examined the chart with some care.

"It's absolutely accurate," Captain Midnight said. "I don't mind saying I am astounded. Who gave it to you?"

"I was told to mention no names, sir," the man respectfully replied.

When Captain Midnight returned the map, the stranger folded it carefully, touched a match to a corner and tossed the blazing paper into a fireplace on one side of the room.

Captain Midnight watched this precautionary measure approvingly.

"In reply to your first question, sir, I am Captain Midnight," the Secret Squadron leader announced. "You are either a spy—and if so, an extremely foolhardy one—or you are here on a very important and legitimate errand. If you are here on a friendly mission, it will be necessary for you to identify yourself. If you cannot, you assuredly will be placed in custody."

The visitor smiled calmly and nodded his head in agreement. He was as cool as the tall man he faced so calmly.

"I expect you to be thoroughly and justifiably suspicious," he replied. "If you were not, I would lose all the respect I now hold for the Secret Squadron."

"Then my request will not be regarded as a personal affront," Captain Midnight said, returning the smile.

Even though Captain Midnight's smile was disarming, there was a tenseness in the Secret Squadron leader's manner that bespoke his readiness to meet and deal with any eventuality. Enemy spies had tried before to obtain information from members of the Secret Squadron, but none had ever succeeded.

"Not at all," replied the unknown visitor. "It would have been unnecessary for me to call on you if a certain other gentleman had been free to come here. Unfortunately he is at this moment in the Far East on a very confidential assignment."

"I believe I know to whom you refer, so we need mention no names," Captain Midnight asserted. "But before we go further, I must ask you to identify yourself more fully."

"That I am prepared to do," the stranger promised. "If you are Captain Midnight, you are sure to be acquainted with a secret identification mark known to only four men in the world. My name does not matter. You will never know it. I carry no written credentials with me. My only credentials are what knowledge I possess—carried in my head."

"Very good!" Captain Midnight was watching the other closely. "There is, as you state, a secret identification sign known to only four men in the world. That knowledge in itself is a measure of identification. If you know that rare and potent sign, every facility of the Secret Squadron will be placed at your instant service."

Captain Midnight pushed a blank sheet of paper and a pencil across the desk. Picking up the pencil deliberately, the man slowly and from memory traced a somewhat intricate design. From a distance the insignia appeared to be a clock with hands pointing to twelve—the hour of midnight—but there were other marks in the pattern of the design that only Captain Midnight and the man who drew them could see.

Nodding in brief acknowledgement of the accuracy of the sign, Captain Midnight seized the paper and applied a match to it instantly. This burning document follow-

ed the map into the fireplace.

"The sign is all that is necessary," Captain Midnight said. "What can I do for you, 'Mr. X'?"

"Ah! 'Mr. X'! That is a fitting title to call me."

The visitor without a name seated himself in a chair facing Captain Midnight across the desk.

He began his story:

"I come from Washington. As you know, the American government has its hands full right now, but nothing must be overlooked. Something of great importance, with dangerous consequences, has just happened. It is necessary to call upon the Secret Squadron for help in this matter, which is vital to the defense of the United States."

"The Secret Squadron is ready and standing by to do whatever must be done," Captain Midnight replied with assurance.

"Perhaps you are familiar with a new type of airplane which is being developed—one that is likely to revolutionize modern aerial warfare and place control of the air in the hands of Uncle Sam?"

"You mean the Flying Wing?"

"It is so called. The ship has been designed and actually flown. Already its potential power has begun to worry the enemy—and now it is worrying *us*. One of the experimental Flying Wings has disappeared, Captain Midnight!"

"Disappeared? You mean it's been stolen?"

"We are not sure," Mr. X replied cautiously. "An American pilot named Ted Roberts, one of our most trusted men, disappeared with it. It would be difficult to believe he had a hand in it. Yet the plane has vanished. Perhaps it was stolen, but we rather doubt it because we have no information as yet that the craft has fallen into enemy hands—and we have a way of knowing the moment it does. But the plane is missing and if the enemy gets possession of it, half of its value will be lost instantly. You know that."

"I understand perfectly." Captain Midnight nodded agreement. "Tell me more. Where did it disappear?"

"The Wing left the West Coast only a few days ago, piloted by Roberts. While the trip was in the nature of a test flight, it was being conducted under hazardous conditions and Roberts was to signal us at the first indication of anything wrong. The craft was scheduled to fly to our Australian base. It had fuel and supplies for such a trip and it was actually sighted once on its course. But the Flying Wing is long overdue at its destination and not a word has been received from Roberts. We have every reason to believe it is lost."

"If it is lost to us, it must be lost to the enemy," Captain Midnight pointed out.

"That is true—if it is *lost*, but we can take no chances," Mr. X said. "There is a possibility that the plane landed on some island and was not destroyed. If that happened the enemy might chance to find it. The intelligence ser-

vice therefore wants the Secret Squadron to conduct a search of the area where the Flying Wing was last seen and where it is believed to have gone down. We know your expert pilots can do it thoroughly and efficiently. If, after your search, no trace of the Flying Wing is found we will know that the secret is beneath the waves —a sad fate but a safe one. But we feel that if any evidence exists that the plane did not fall into the sea, which yields no secrets, you will be able to locate it."

"You place vast confidence in us, sir!" Captain Midnight said, not without a stern degree of pride.

"We have reason to know that our confidence in you is not misplaced. We are well aware of what you have done before."

"We'll undertake the job," Captain Midnight declared. "But you still haven't told me where the Wing was last seen or reported."

"We must look at a large-scale chart of the South Pacific," the messenger stated.

From a rack on one side of the room Captain Midnight pulled out a large map.

"I'm sure this is what you have in mind, Mr. X."

"Wonderful!" Mr. X said. "It's fully as detailed as U. S. Navy charts in Washington."

"It was supplied for our use by the Navy," Captain Midnight said dryly.

"Oh, I see!"

Mr. X, laughing with hearty appreciation, inspected

the chart closely.

"Ah. The Flying Wing disappeared right about here. A destroyer on patrol duty sighted it passing over approximately this position. Now there are a few uncharted islands south and west of here. The probability is great that if anything happened to the Wing and it was able to reach land, it found refuge on one of those dots of land. Islands farther along in the direction of Australia are British, and officials of our ally would have informed us had the Wing made a landing there."

"Whom do these uncharted islands belong to?" Captain Midnight asked.

Mr. X shrugged.

"Several nations claim them, but they are hardly worth fussing about. Most of them are of volcanic origin and not very well suited for trans-Pacific airline bases. Their area is too small for naval installations. However, some of the islands are owned by a syndicate of pearl fishermen who pay taxes to no one. I do not recall the name of the pearl-fishing syndicate, but it hardly matters. I don't think much pearl fishing is being done nowadays."

"Good!" Captain Midnight said. "These islands will give us a starting base. I assume they are uninhabited?"

"Except for a few natives, but they are harmless and friendly."

Rising, Captain Midnight shook hands with Mr. X.

"Our pilots are going to have a little bombing practice this afternoon," Captain Midnight said. "Would

you care to stay and see the show?"

Mr. X shook his head.

"No," he declared. "I must hurry back to Hawaii. A number of matters await my immediate attention. But—"

Mr. X paused.

"What were you going to say?" Captain Midnight asked.

"I was thinking of giving you a warning. Then I realized that the Secret Squadron is always on the alert," said Mr. X. "Still, I may as well tell you what I was about to say. I was going to ask you to watch out for the Barracuda—"

"The Barracuda!" Captain Midnight exclaimed. "I thought he was dead—shot down by our planes in the Pacific!"

"Our intelligence reports state that he is still alive," Mr. X revealed. "He may have a secret outpost in the vast reaches of the Pacific, built along the same lines as your own. Your base has been so well concealed that the enemy has failed to locate it. His would be equally hard for us to find."

"Do you think he knows of the Flying Wing?" Captain Midnight asked.

"We are certain he does," Mr. X replied. "Very little happens in the Pacific that the Barracuda does not learn about. He is the center of a vast espionage ring, as you know. Very likely he will engage in as extensive a search as you in order to find the missing plane."

"Against such odds, your faith in the Secret Squadron is most gratifying," Captain Midnight observed quietly.

"That's right, Captain Midnight," said Mr. X succinctly. "Uncle Sam is not apprehensive that you will be unable to handle the Barracuda. You already have proved a match for him."

Mr. X hurried to his plane. A few minutes later the gleaming ship was in the air, headed northward toward Hawaii.

Hardly had the craft disappeared when the roar of a plane motor sounded over the island. Heads turned anxiously, every man alert for the possibility of an enemy craft.

A small pursuit ship came zooming out of the sky and skimmed over the island. The tension eased as the star-shaped markings disclosed it was an American plane, and the design on the fuselage of the cockpit showed the winged insignia of the Secret Squadron.

"Who's that, Kelly?" Captain Midnight asked as he returned to headquarters.

The Irishman in the radio room grinned.

"Look again, Captain Midnight!" he said.

The plane was returning, cutting figure eights and rolling like a playful, winged porpoise. Then its motor throttled down and the craft coasted to a perfect landing on the field.

From the cockpit hopped a girl with yellow hair.

"Joyce!" Captain Midnight exclaimed. "I thought she



"Joyce! I Thought She Was at Headquarters."

was at headquarters."

"She went up while you were talking to the mysterious stranger," Kelly said. "She said things were too tame around here."

Captain Midnight waved to the girl, who returned the hail and started toward him.

"Things aren't going to be 'tame' around here much longer, Kelly," Captain said. "There's an important job to be done."

CHAPTER TWO

THE BARRACUDA

Captain Midnight's success as an auxiliary to the armed forces of the United States had been imitated to a high degree by the enemy in its emplovment of the renegade known as the Barracuda. If imitation is the sincerest form of flattery, Captain Midnight was highly complimented, for the Barracuda Swarm, the organization headed by the Barracuda himself, was in every respect except honest allegiance organized along the same lines as the Secret Squadron.

At the moment Captain Midnight was receiving Mr. X other events were transpiring on another bit of land in the isle-studded vastness of the Pacific. The Barracuda was likewise receiving a visitor.

A woman dressed in a leather jacket and slacks was disembarking from a bi-motored amphibian plane that had landed on this island.

Under the eyes of a sullen group of slant-eyed men armed with rifles, she approached a cluster of palms, among which was a cleverly concealed, small brick building.

She was in her early thirties and very beautiful. Her black, glistening hair gave her a strange, exotic look which seemed to harmonize with the aviation attire she

was wearing. As she approached the brick building she paused a second, pulled a small mirror from her pocket and daintily daubed her nose with powder. The care she took of her appearance showed that she was conscious of her beauty, conserving of it and anxious to capitalize on its advantages.

This woman was on an important mission, yet she stopped to powder her nose.

The door swung open and a man emerged from the brick building. He too was striking in appearance. His eyes, large round orbs, flickered with green lights in their depths. There was a hint of Satanic cunning in his expression. He was not white, not Oriental, but both.

"Greetings, Carla, my dear!" he spoke to the woman. "I am glad you received my call."

He ushered her into the house and seated her in a chair. As he took another chair facing her he went on:

"I need your help, Carla," he said. "I must learn something from Captain Midnight."

Carla sucked in her breath sharply as her eyes met those of the man known as the Barracuda.

"So it's about this mysterious Captain Midnight, Your Excellency?"

Without answering, the Barracuda clapped his hands. From an adjoining room came a tall, gray-haired man, who bowed first to the Barracuda and then faced the woman.

"This is Carla Rotan," the Barracuda introduced.

"The woman I have spoken of. She is the one I have chosen to learn secrets from Captain Midnight for us. Carla, this is my lieutenant, Captain Franz."

Captain Franz eyed the woman coldly.

"She looks thoroughly efficient," he said quietly. "But she must be, for Captain Midnight is—you might say—extraordinary."

"He is dangerous, is he not, Captain Franz?" Carla asked.

"I fought against him and those of his organization in the First World War!" Captain Franz said bitterly. "Yes, my dear! Most dangerous!"

"But we are dangerous too," Carla said, lowering her eyelids.

"We serve the highest bidder," the Barracuda said oilily. "We are paid by Japan, a nation at war with the United States. Our employer is most anxious to learn about a new type of airplane America has developed. That plane may change the whole course of war in the air."

"Ah! So this is my mission?"

"Yes, Carla," the Barracuda admitted. "This plane, known as the Flying Wing, has been carefully guarded, but an experimental machine recently was lost sight of over the Pacific. The details of its disappearance are rather confusing—"

"Meaning we had something to do with it?" Carla asked smiling.

"Yes, that is correct, except that the Flying Wing did not fall into our hands as we expected," the Barracuda went on. "We do not know where it is now, nor if there is a chance to recover it. But we believe Captain Midnight knows more about where it might be than we. Therefore, we must know where he is searching, so that we may search there too."

"And I am to find out?" Carla asked.

"We must know everything he knows," the Barracuda asserted. "If possible you are to steer him into our hands. If we could capture him, there are ways to make him tell what he knows."

"I see. I have played the role before," Carla said with another smile.

"You must play it better than ever before," Franz warned. "Captain Midnight is no easy mark. You will understand when you meet him. He is backed by strong men and good planes. His aides are no easier foes. Chuck Ramsay is a crack flier. I would have hated to meet him in my younger days as a member of the Imperial German Air Corps. And Joyce Ryan! What an addition she would make to your organization, Your Excellency! As for you, Carla Rotan, I would watch her above all. She may prove a pitfall for you."

"Ah! She is in love with Captain Midnight!"

Captain Franz shook his head.

"She is only a girl in her teens," he stated coldly. "Captain Midnight is much older—old enough to be her

father."

"Then she is in love with Chuck." Carla nodded her head decisively.

"Always thinking of love, eh, Carla?" the Barracuda said with a laugh. "No. While Chuck is nearer Joyce's age, the girl is too young yet to grow serious. She is in love with life, adventure, the outdoors, aviation. Joyce is understandable only if you know Americans, for she is an American girl."

Carla Rotan's face grew hard.

"I do not like Americans," she said. "I detest them."

"It is best that you conceal your hatred for Americans, Carla," the Barracuda warned. "You must portray an American woman—best a wealthy American woman. You come for some purpose—suppose you are searching for a dear friend or a brother who has been lost in the Pacific. No one must suspect you are an enemy spy. You will contact the Secret Squadron, meet Captain Midnight and learn what information he has on the Flying Wing."

"It is very easy to issue orders, but where am I to find this mysterious Captain Midnight?" Carla asked.

"Captain Franz!" The Barracuda addressed his lieutenant.

"Yes, Your Excellency?"

"What are the latest reports?"

"Our scouts have reported a small pursuit plane bearing the winged-clock insignia of the Secret Squadron in

sector No. 194!" Captain Franz reported.

The Barracuda took a chart from the table. He marked a circle on the chart and handed it to Carla Rotan.

"Sector No. 194 is here," he exclaimed. "A small pursuit plane is not likely to fly far from its base. That would indicate there is a Secret Squadron base somewhere in the vicinity. Work from that information and I'm sure you'll be able to contact agents of Captain Midnight."

"I shall start at once," the woman said.

"Take care," the Barracuda cautioned. "Do not send me radio messages unless you have urgent information, for the Secret Squadron always listens on my wavelength. Also, do not try to double-cross me. I know you detest everyone—I sometimes can't understand how you get along with yourself. But, no matter what your feelings, I advise loyalty to my organization. I may appear where and when you do not expect me and if you are engaged in double dealings you shall be made sorry."

Carla seemed to shudder, but an instant later she was in full possession of herself. She rose from her chair and, putting the map in a pocket of her jacket, she smiled and extended her hand toward the Barracuda, who bowed over it ceremoniously. Even when threatening murder, the Barracuda was extravagantly polite.

Carla turned and went to the door, where she paused for an instant to address the Barracuda once more:

"I may take Carson with me?" she asked.

"It is best, perhaps," the Barracuda replied. "He may

pose as your pilot. A woman flying alone over the Pacific in these days would arouse undue suspicions. Carson will allay these and besides he may help in—ah—little things which are considered indelicate for a woman to do."

The Barracuda's unpleasant laugh brought a smile to Carla's lips.

"But I am to do the spying," she confirmed. "And my share of the reward will be greatest?"

"That is correct, my dear!"

"Then everything is set," Carla Rotan said.

She turned and left the house. From the doorway, the Barracuda watched her walk rapidly to the beach where she was joined by Jack Carson, her pilot.

"I am glad she is on our side, Captain Franz," the Barracuda said as he watched her. "She is a cruel, barbarous woman!"

Unsmiling, the Barracuda turned to his companion.

"—and the cleverest spy that ever filched an international secret," he added.

The roar of airplane motors on the beach told that Carla Rotan and her pilot were leaving. The large cabin plane circled the island before nosing northward. As the amphibian passed out of sight, the Barracuda closed the door and, with Captain Franz following like a faithful hound at his heels, passed through the room where he had conferred with Carla Rotan to a smaller room, richly furnished, which served as his headquar-

ters and office.

"Come," he addressed Captain Franz. "I will show you something."

The Barracuda stood before a section of wall covered with maps showing every section of the globe. In many of the maps were stuck colored pins, locating agents of the Barracuda's widespread spy network.

Lifting his hand, the Barracuda touched a little silver pin at the bottom of one of the maps. The map moved as a panel behind it slid back, revealing a stairway descending to a basement beneath the house.

Turning to Captain Franz, the Barracuda spoke:

"You first, my dear friend. Not that I fear a knife in the back from you, but carelessness often becomes a habit so I never indulge in it."

Captain Franz bowed, without a change of expression on his immobile face, and went down the stairs, followed by his chief.

The basement was fitted with a series of steel cells. All were empty except the first, in which a young man, dressed in an American aviator's uniform, was sitting. The man rose and stood by the bars as he saw the two men descending the stairs. The dim light showed a bearded face and long, uncut hair. Evidently the prisoner had been here for some time.

"This is inhumane!" the prisoner said, addressing the Barracuda. "Prisoners of war are not kept in dungeons like criminals—at least not nowadays."

The Barracuda halted in front of the cell and spoke soothingly to the captive.

"Please do not be impatient, Mr. Roberts," he said. "I am seriously thinking of giving you your freedom."

"You say that to torture me!"

"Do not fool yourself, Roberts," the Barracuda said sharply. "If I wished to torture you, I would do it with more finesse. I really intend to release you. What is one prisoner more or less? We have many of them, but you can serve a very useful purpose."

Captain Franz had been watching with a puzzled expression on his face.

"Who is he?" he asked as the Barracuda finished speaking.

"This is Ted Roberts, the pilot of the Flying Wing, which we are so anxious to get into our hands."

"But I thought the plane was lost."

"It was," the Barracuda replied. "After Roberts was captured, the agent failed to reach one of our bases. He landed in the Pacific—where we do not know, for Roberts had damaged the radio on the plane."

Captain Franz smiled. He understood. The whole plan was an example of the Barracuda's evil cunning.

Roberts was listening eagerly to the information which the Barracuda seemingly was dropping from unguarded lips. Once Roberts was released, he would hurry to authorities and tell them that the Flying Wing had not fallen into enemy hands after all. The Americans would

take no chances that the new type of plane had landed on a desolate island to be found later by the enemy: a search would be started at once.

Without using his own men, the Barracuda intended to be the beneficiary of that search. Carla would notify the Barracuda when the Flying Wing was found, or where it probably was located. Then the Barracuda's own men would swoop down on the prize and carry it away, by force or by stealth, whichever plan suited the conditions.

A key was inserted in the lock on the cell and the Barracuda threw open the door.

Roberts hesitated a moment, as if he feared a trick. Then he came out of the door.

"My men will fly you to an island where you may expect to be picked up by American warships," the Barracuda said. "Take him to Sergeant Saki, Captain Franz. He already has instructions."

Captain Franz and the prisoner disappeared up the stairs. The Barracuda followed and closed the wall panel as he emerged into the small office.

The international outlaw seated himself in a chair and smiled. The plan was so simple that it was bound to succeed. Carla would learn where the flying Wing was being sought, once a search was started. Then, with the Barracuda Swarm, a fanatical group of followers, the aviation secret could be quite easily swept from under the nose of Captain Midnight's Secret Squadron.

A few minutes later he heard the sound of a plane taking off. Roberts was being flown to an island where he would be picked up. The plane circled overhead and the Barracuda listened to the music. Such planes! Such men! Perhaps the Americans were greater rough-and-tumble fighters, but the Barracuda had the blood-thirstiest collection of choice cutthroats.

The Barracuda Swarm could undertake destruction or sabotage with the same fiendish delight, and assassination was regarded as a mission of glory. Above all was the suicide squadron of eighteen planes which acted as the personal bodyguard for the Barracuda himself. This squadron would undertake anything the Barracuda commanded.

Why? Even the Barracuda sometimes asked himself that question when he forgot the hypnotic power of his black, Satanic eyes. The Barracuda seemed to exert the influence of an opiate over his men. He lured his followers into his organization through greed, for he paid well for men's treachery. But once an individual succumbed to the rigid discipline of the Barracuda Swarm, he became a slave to the powerful black-eyed schemer who commanded them.

Seldom did a member of the Barracuda Swarm ever break away from the organization. In the few times it had been tried, the body of the man who wished to sever his relations with the Barracuda was found later, horribly mutilated in death. Death, in fact, was the

only liberator for those who served the Barracuda.

The Barracuda went over his reports and, as he finished, he again summoned Captain Franz.

"Yes, Excellency?" the officer's tired voice asked as he appeared in the office of his master.

"I think we shall make a flight tomorrow," the Barracuda announced.

"Yes, Excellency. What course?"

"We'll do a little investigating in sector 194," the Barracuda said. "We shall see if Carla Rotan establishes contact with the Secret Squadron."

CHAPTER THREE

A DEEPENING MYSTERY

Joyce, swinging her helmet and goggles over her arm, came smilingly toward Captain Midnight. Her cheeks were flushed and her eyes sparkling. She shook out her hair over her shoulders.

"You're going to scold me, Captain Midnight," she said with a laugh.

"I should, but I won't," Captain Midnight replied, his stern face relaxing as he smiled back at the girl. "I've told you not to stunt so close to the ground. But if you insist on doing it, just remember it's your own neck you're breaking."

"I'm sorry, Captain Midnight," Joyce replied sobering. "It was a temptation I just couldn't resist. That new pursuit is something to write home about! Boy! It can do everything!"

Chuck Ramsay, dressed in the natty Secret Squadron uniform, came out of the headquarters building and strode toward Captain Midnight and Joyce. His mouth opened:

"Joyce—"

"I've already reprimanded her, Chuck," Captain Midnight said.

"And I'm duly penitent," Joyce replied. "Now can't

we talk about something else? What's up, Captain Midnight? Something's in the air besides our planes. I can see it in your eyes."

Joyce was walking beside Captain Midnight in the direction of Secret Squadron headquarters.

"Yeah, Captain Midnight," Chuck said. "You can't put anything over on Joyce. Come on, spill the news!"

"Something *is* in the wind, folks," the Secret Squadron leader confessed to the pair. "But if I tell you, you mustn't spill a word of it. The only reason I'm telling you is because I've decided you're to help."

"I'm all ears and no mouth," Joyce vowed.

The trio entered the headquarters building and went directly to the Secret Squadron leader's office. There, behind closed doors, Captain Midnight told of the visit of Mr. X and the story of the missing Flying Wing.

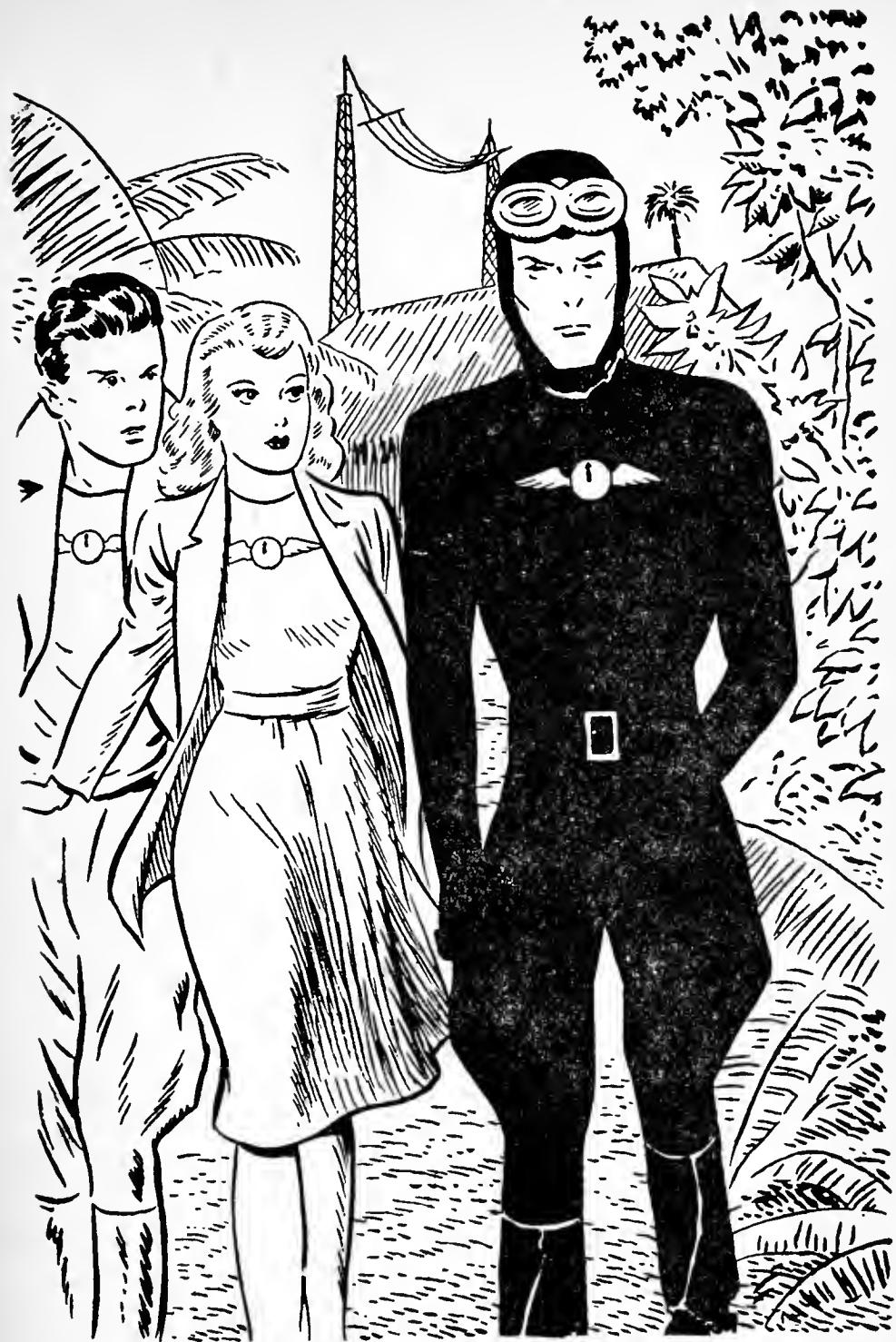
"The Flying Wing!" Joyce exclaimed.

She had heard rumors of the revolutionary craft—a plane with no tail, simply a wing pushed through the air by propellers. Slightly V-shaped in appearance, it looked weirdly like some monster of the stratosphere. But, proved to be more economical than standard types of equal size, it promised to bring many changes to aviation.

"The United States has asked us to find it," Captain Midnight said, "and we intend to if it is at all possible."

"How soon do we leave?" Chuck asked abruptly.

"We'll leave by night—probably tomorrow," Captain Midnight said. "That'll give us time to reach the place



"What's Up, Captain Midnight?" Asked Joyce

where the Wing was last seen, by daylight day after tomorrow."

"Who's going?" Joyce inquired.

"You, Chuck, Ikky and myself," Captain Midnight enumerated. "We can keep in touch with headquarters here and send for more help whenever we want it. Too large a flight of planes would be hard to conceal from the enemy—who may be looking for the Wing too."

"I'm ready," Chuck said. "But before we go, can I try the new pursuit job, Captain Midnight? Joyce had her fling in it."

"You can take it up this afternoon, Chuck," Captain Midnight promised.

"I'm going with you," Joyce said.

"Okay, but I'll do the flying," Chuck agreed, grinning widely.

A few minutes later the pursuit ship's motor roared and the new plane swung around and taxied into the wind. Heading for a take-off, it swooped up gently and then went into a steep climb as it veered out over the ocean.

Joyce wore earphones under her helmet, and a microphone in front of her lips enabled her to talk to Chuck at the controls.

"Wouldn't it be wonderful if we'd find the Flying Wing this trip, Chuck?" Joyce asked.

The question was purely rhetorical, because Joyce liked to imagine miracles. The whole area surrounding the Secret Squadron base was patrolled daily, so there

was small likelihood that the Wing had landed on any of the near-by islands. The point where the Wing had been last seen was far south of the base.

"I wish we would," Chuck replied. "Wouldn't Captain Midnight be surprised?"

Chuck's answer was as suppositional as Joyce's question.

"No harm in just hunting," Joyce said. "Let's circle the islands."

The pursuit ship nosed toward one of the near-by islands. Chuck dipped to within a thousand feet of the beach and began to make a systematic exploration of the flat little atoll.

Suddenly a low exclamation came to Joyce's ears.

"Jumpin' Jupiter, Joyce! Look over to the left. Am I seein' things?"

Was it the Flying Wing? Joyce twisted her head. Off to the left of the pursuit plane was a large amphibian ducking out of a cloud formation and diving toward them.

It wasn't the Flying Wing. Joyce's first glimpse assured her that the machine coming toward them had a tail.

Although the amphibian resembled Captain Midnight's plane, it certainly wasn't his. Joyce and Chuck had left him at the base a few minutes before. Captain Midnight couldn't have warmed up the plane and taken to the air in so short a time.

A sudden thought struck Joyce. It was not a pleasant

thought and it sent cold chills racing along her spine. It might be an enemy plane!

Chuck swung his own craft around to meet the stranger. As the nose swept around, six machine guns and a cannon were focussed from the wings of the pursuit ship on the amphibian. The strange aircraft seemed to feel the deadliness of the stare of the gun muzzles. It banked sharply.

Joyce saw her hands moving toward the firing mechanism of the rear gun. She switched the firing button off "safety." Joyce had never used a gun in action before and she wondered how it would feel to send deadly 50-caliber bullets into the cabin of another airplane. But, Joyce remembered, the other fellow, if he were a Jap, would have no compunction about shooting at the Secret Squadron plane.

The amphibian was two-motored and this was cause for some relief. Joyce recalled that the Barracuda, Captain Midnight's deadliest enemy, had a four-motored plane.

Joyce could see no markings on the ship to identify it as either friend or foe.

Circling now, Chuck presently brought the pursuit plane alongside the amphibian. He was cautious, for this might be a trap. But Joyce felt relieved. If the pilot of the other ship wanted a scrap he certainly would not expose the side of his plane to the deadly fire from a pursuit plane. As a rule, armor on airplanes is in the front and rear on the theory that most of the bullets

fired at a plane will come when the craft is going into battle or running away from it. The sides are unarmored so that even a 30-caliber machine gun is quite deadly in a flank attack.

Joyce caught a glimpse of the strange pilot. He was dressed in civilian clothes and he was not a Jap. As the pilot caught a glimpse of the figures in the pursuit plane he waved his hand and pointed downward.

"He wants us to land, Chuck," Joyce said.

"Yeah. I see him," Chuck replied. "What'll I do?"

"It's a risk but maybe he's in trouble. I can keep him covered while we land on the beach."

"Okay," Chuck decided. "We'll take a chance."

The pursuit ship nosed downward and glided toward the level beach.

Joyce noted that the amphibian was following, but it was dropping to the water. As the pursuit plane rolled across the sand to a stop, the larger cabin ship taxied over the waves toward shore.

Chuck swung the pursuit around so that it covered the other plane with its multiple guns in the wing. Keeping the motor idling so that it would work the firing mechanism on the guns, he waited.

The amphibian swung around and was carried up on the beach by a wave. The cabin door opened and from the plane stepped, not a man, but a woman!

Chuck whistled.

"Plenty good-lookin'."

"Hm-m!" Joyce said, half to herself. "This is worse

than I thought."

"What do you mean—worse?"

Joyce did not answer. The woman, dressed in a leather jacket and slacks, was bare-headed—but of course she had not needed a helmet in a cabin plane.

She walked gingerly over the sand, avoiding puddles of sea water.

"I guess I'd better talk with her, Chuck," Joyce said, unsnapping the buckle on her safety belt.

Climbing out, Joyce dropped to the ground beside the pursuit plane.

At sight of the girl, the woman appeared almost as surprised as Chuck and Joyce had been when they saw the woman.

"Hello there!" Joyce called. "Having some trouble?"

The woman quickly recovered her composure and answered:

"Oh, I should say we are! We're looking for an inhabited island in this locality, but there seem to be none. Perhaps you can direct us?"

The woman spoke in a polished, cultivated voice. Although her speech was perfect, it struck Joyce as a little too perfect. Nothing in the woman's manners or dress suggested that she was not a woman of good taste, yet Joyce thought she detected quite a different character lurking beneath those eyelids that drooped rather coquettishly over the woman's eyes.

Joyce was quite close to the woman now.

"There are no inhabited islands around here," Joyce

said pleasantly. "At least none unrestricted to civilians. There are some military and naval bases, but from these civilians are barred. Are you looking for any particular island?"

"I need supplies," the woman explained. "I am Mrs. F. W. Bosmouth of Boston—"

"Glad to know you, Mrs. Bosmouth. I'm Joyce Ryan of—of California."

Joyce had her identification as a member of the Secret Squadron on the tip of her tongue but she checked herself before she revealed her true identity. After all, Joyce had no way of knowing what or whom the mysterious Mrs. Bosmouth might be in sympathy with.

"I'm so glad to meet such a charming girl," Mrs. Bosmouth went on, her voice syrupy with sweetness. "I know you can help me find supplies. I'm attempting a long flight and I'm afraid I'll run short if I don't restock."

Joyce shook her head.

"This isn't a very healthy time to be flying over the Pacific Ocean," she said. "Especially for Americans not in the armed forces. I take it you *are* an American?"

The woman stiffened.

"Of course!" she said, as if it were utterly unthinkable for her to be anything else. "Aren't you?"

"Certainly," Joyce said. "But I've business here. Unless you have an official reason for being in this part of the ocean, I'd return if I were you to mainland as quickly as possible. In fact, even getting back to mainland is

dangerous."

Mrs. Bossmouth seemed distressed.

"Dear me! That's a horrible possibility. I'm sure the interceptors would let me through."

"American planes might, but the enemy wouldn't, Mrs. Bossmouth," Joyce explained. "Enemy planes may be operating from some of the islands in this part of the ocean."

"Joyce!"

Chuck was calling from the cockpit of the pursuit plane.

"Oh, Chuck," Joyce answered. "Come here, will you?"

From the parked pursuit plane Chuck trotted toward the two women. As Chuck made his appearance, the civilian pilot of Mrs. Bossmouth's amphibian came forward and Joyce wondered if he, like Chuck, had been covering the parley of the two women with a machine gun ready for action.

A pleased smile crossed Mrs. Bossmouth's face at the sight of Chuck making his way across the beach.

"This is my friend, Chuck Ramsay," Joyce introduced.

"And this is my pilot, Jack Carson," Mrs. Bossmouth announced as her companion joined them.

Turning to Chuck, Joyce explained Mrs. Bossmouth's apparent predicament.

"Where should she go to get supplies, Chuck?" Joyce asked.

"Well, the base is about the only place I can suggest," Chuck said, wrinkling his brow in thought. "We're fly-

ing there right away, and we can escort you there, Mrs. Bosmouth. Perhaps you can make arrangements there to fly back to the mainland."

"Oh! That will be splendid!" Mrs. Bosmouth gushed. "You've helped us no end!"

Returning to her pursuit plane, Joyce climbed into the gunner's seat and waited for Chuck to start the motor. Somehow Joyce didn't like that woman, but first impressions aren't always conclusive, she realized.

"What do you think of them, Chuck?" Joyce asked through the communication phone as Chuck started the propeller.

"Boy! She's a knockout!" Chuck replied, not very much to Joyce's satisfaction.

"They certainly didn't tell us much about themselves," Joyce pointed out. "I don't know what Captain Midnight'll think when we drag them in."

"What else could we do?" Chuck asked.

Joyce realized that they had no alternative, really. They could hardly leave this woman and her pilot stranded on an uninhabited atoll in the middle of the Pacific.

After the pursuit craft took off, Chuck circled the island until the amphibian was in the air. Then he headed for the Secret Squadron base, and in a few minutes they were gliding toward a landing on the field near the headquarters building.

Ichabod Mudd was on hand to help Joyce from the plane. The old mechanic and personal friend of Captain

Midnight was an angular, tall and gawky Arkansawyer, with a heart as warm as the South Pacific sun. His deepest love was for the motors that he cared for, and it was an established fact at the Squadron base that every plane worked perfectly.

"Where'd you pick that up, Joyce?" Ikky asked, nodding toward the amphibian that had landed on the flying field.

"We found it growing on a cloud, Ikky," Joyce said. "That's about all we know about it, too, except that there's a woman and a man in it."

"A lady—"

Mudd broke off as he saw Mrs. Bosmouth emerge from the plane.

"Loopin' loops! I see her. She looks like the queen of the Carolines."

"Her pilot is a scoundrel if I ever saw one," Joyce said, as Carson got out of the plane. "He's shifty-eyed and weak-faced—just the kind of pilot you'd run into smuggling dope in pre-war days. I'll bet that's where she picked him up."

"Good civilian pilots are scarce nowadays," Mudd reminded. "Maybe he's all she could get."

Captain Midnight, summoned by the return of his young friends and the simultaneous arrival of a strange plane, was coming across the field from headquarters. Chuck, Joyce and Mudd joined him and the four of them made their way toward Mrs. Bosmouth and her pilot.

"This is Mrs. Bosmouth, Captain—"

Captain Midnight hastily interrupted Joyce's introduction before the girl had a chance to reveal his name.

"Is there anything we can do to help you, Mrs. Bosmouth?" he asked, smiling politely at the new arrival.

"I should say there is," Mrs. Bosmouth replied, lowering her eyelids as she returned the smile. "I need supplies badly and your—ah—base seems the only place where I can get them. You see, I am entirely at your mercy—ah—Captain—"

"I'll be glad to give you enough supplies to reach the mainland," Captain Midnight offered. "It is best that you go there, for these are perilous times, Mrs. Bosmouth."

"Perhaps it would be best—"

The woman hesitated.

"What are you doing in this vicinity, if I may ask?" the Secret Squadron leader inquired, watching the young Mrs. Bosmouth attentively as she replied.

"I am looking for my brother—my dear brother who is lost," Mrs. Bosmouth said with a sigh. "He disappeared in the South Seas some months ago while trying to fly to Australia."

She sighed again and there was a catch in her voice—a catch in her manner too, thought Joyce.

"I did not quite catch your name, Captain—"

Captain Midnight smiled slightly.

"I don't wish to seem impolite, Mrs. Bosmouth, but it is best for me to remain unidentified. However, I'm

quite willing to do everything I can to help you. Several of my planes will fly to the mainland shortly. If you go with them you'll be quite safe."

"Thank you, Captain," Mrs. Bosmouth replied. "I'm grateful for your offer, but I came here hoping to find my brother alive, and I see no reason why I shouldn't continue my search."

"Lady, there's a war on," Ichabod Mudd cut in roughly. "That's a pretty good reason, seems to me."

"But I'm a non-combatant—"

"The enemy isn't likely to understand," Captain Midnight tried to explain.

"I'm still not afraid in the least!" Mrs. Bosmouth spoke with determination. "I consider my duty to my brother far more important than my own safety. If I can refuel here and replenish my food supplies, I shall be grateful. Otherwise, we have enough gas to fly to some other island—"

"Mrs. Bosmouth," Captain Midnight said sternly, "the government of the United States has placed me in command of this island. As long as you are here, you are subject to my orders. You will fly to the mainland with my planes tomorrow. Whatever you do after you reach the mainland is not my concern, but I advise you to remain there."

Captain Midnight turned on his heel and strode back toward his headquarters.

"Why, I like *that!*!" exclaimed Mrs. Bosmouth angrily.

CHAPTER FOUR

A POLITE THIRD DEGREE

Carla Rotan, the international woman spy who was posing as Mrs. F. W. Bosmouth of Boston, maintained the pose of a righteously offended woman as she selected supplies for her trip to the mainland.

Her treatment from Jenkins, the acting quartermaster, and other members of the outpost personnel was above reproach, but she managed to voice her disapproval of Captain Midnight's order that she go to the mainland on the following day—and stay there.

Joyce personally avoided the woman. Joyce had no fear of Mrs. Bosmouth, as Carla was known to Joyce, but the girl member of the Secret Squadron realized that many things that were commonplace knowledge on this island, might be highly important military secrets. Joyce had no reason to suspect that Mrs. Bosmouth was a spy—in fact, such a dire thought had not yet occurred to Joyce—but Mrs. Bosmouth might repeat important information learned accidentally and the information might eventually find its way to the enemy.

After the supplies were loaded into the amphibian plane, Mrs. Bosmouth and her pilot went for a stroll alone on the beach. Unfortunately the conversation between the two was not overheard by Secret Squadron

members.

"We were born under a lucky star, Jack," Mrs. Bos-mouth told her pilot.

"I don't understand what makes you think so," Jack Carson replied. "If this dictatorial commander sends us to the mainland we'll be two weeks behind in our work. The Barracuda won't like it!"

"Do you know whom you were talking to, Jack? Have you the slightest idea as to the identity of this 'dictatorial commander'?"

"Why—no. He was very reticent about telling his name—"

"That is the reason I say we were born under a lucky star! The man you were so put out about is Captain Midnight of the Secret Squadron! The very person the Barracuda sent us to find."

"Captain Midnight!" Carson exclaimed in surprise.

"Sh-h! Not so loud. We might be overheard."

"But—"

"This is a base of the Secret Squadron," Mrs. Bos-mouth explained.

"I can't understand how you know!"

"Everything was clear when the Captain himself refused to reveal his identity. There was no reason for that unless his identity was a military secret. The identity of Captain Midnight *is* a military secret! It is something the Barracuda would like to be sure about. Even *where* Captain Midnight is hiding is worth much."

"It's just a guess, Carla. You might be wrong."



"Captain Midnight!" Carson Exclaimed in Surprise

"Not so much a guess. Everything fits," Mrs. Bosmouth pointed out. "The girl told me her name was Joyce Ryan. There may be more than one Joyce Ryan in the world, but only one is likely to be found with Captain Midnight. And Chuck Ramsav! We've heard of him too! How stupid of you not to guess, Jack."

"You're right, Carla!" Carson exclaimed excitedly.

Carla beamed with pride over her deductions.

"Now, let's figure out what else we have learned from Captain Midnight's actions. He evidently wants to get rid of us immediately, for he has ordered us to leave tomorrow. That indicates he is up to something. Do you suppose it has any connection with the Flying Wing?"

"Perhaps. Only we don't know how much he knows of the Flying Wing, Carla. If we could only communicate with the Barracuda—"

"We don't dare," Carla decided. "There's too much of a chance of our getting caught if we used our radio on this island. Later, perhaps, but not now. I would suspect, however, that his hurry to get rid of us has something to do with an important mission, one that the Barracuda would like to know about. And I can think of nothing more suited to Captain Midnight's abilities at present than a search for the Flying Wing. I wonder what he does know about it?"

"How could we find out?" Carson asked.

"There's one way," Mrs. Bosmouth said sharply. "That is to keep our eyes and ears open. We learned a great deal from very little after we met Joyce and Chuck. Per-

ways we can learn more by contacting members of the Secret Squadron."

"Here's our opportunity," Carson said, nodding ahead.

Along the beach, strolling toward Carson and the woman spy, was Joyce, walking alone to relax from the strenuous events of the day.

Carla patted her pilot on the arm.

"Ah, Jack! What did I tell you about being born under a lucky star! Here's where we learn—plenty!"

Jack nodded.

"It is best that I leave her to you alone," he said.

Quickly the pilot detached himself and slipped away toward headquarters.

"Oh, hello! How are you, Joyce!" Mrs. Bosmouth called sweetly as she came within sight of the girl.

Joyce, deeply engrossed in her thoughts, had not noticed Mrs. Bosmouth's approach, nor had she seen the mysterious woman talking so earnestly with her pilot, who now had disappeared.

The girl looked up in surprise.

"Oh! This is unexpected, Mrs. Bosmouth. I didn't imagine I'd find you here."

"I was walking for relaxation," Mrs. Bosmouth said, watching the girl.

"So was I," Joyce said, and, since she really had no excuse to act unfriendly toward the woman, she added, "won't you join me?"

"I was about to suggest it," Mrs. Bosmouth said, with a little, rippling laugh. "It seems as if we are the only

two women on this island. I thought it might be a good idea for us to become better acquainted."

"Of course we should," Joyce admitted.

Perhaps Joyce had obtained the wrong impression of the woman on the first meeting. Mrs. Bosmouth struck Joyce now as trying very hard to be agreeable.

"I understood that women were being accepted by the army," Mrs. Bosmouth went on. "You are one of them, I presume."

Joyce was instantly on guard. The woman might be trying to learn something. Yet the question was a natural one.

"That," Joyce said, "is a military secret. Let's talk about you, Mrs. Bosmouth. I think you're awfully brave to fly out over the ocean. I'm—I'm terribly sorry about your brother."

"It is so difficult to make people understand," Mrs. Bosmouth said. "I realize there are risks, but I must find him."

"These are serious times, Mrs. Bosmouth," Joyce sympathized. "One of our mechanics was telling me that your plane caused considerable excitement before we landed. It's an amphibian and the pilots thought at first it was larger than it is—like the one flown by the man known as the Barracuda."

At the mention of the Barracuda's name, Mrs. Bosmouth noticeably stiffened.

"What?" she asked. "What was that you said?"

"Oh, excuse me!" Joyce said. "It is a strange name—

the Barracuda—but that is the only name we have for him. He is a foreign agent who has caused us some trouble."

"Do you know this man—the Barracuda?"

"Not personally," Joyce laughed. "Do you?"

Joyce had asked the question half in jest, and she was surprised at the woman's reaction.

"No! No!" Mrs. Bosmouth said hastily. "I was simply astounded at such a queer name—the name of a very ferocious fish applied to a man. I've never heard anything like it before."

"It is indeed a queer name and we certainly don't enjoy having anything to do with him," Joyce said.

"Then you *do* know him?" Mrs. Bosmouth asked.

Joyce hesitated. The woman was trying to pump her. Joyce wondered if she was telling too much. All her instinct warned her to be on guard.

"As I said before, we've had some trouble with him," she said, noncommittally. "In fact, an awful lot of trouble. He's the head of a spying organization—international gangsters—allied with the enemy."

"Goodness gracious!" Mrs. Bosmouth exclaimed.

Joyce thought her exclamation just a little too vehement to be convincing.

"Isn't it dangerous for a young girl like you to be out in the middle of the ocean with people like the Barracuda around?" the woman continued.

Joyce hesitated uncertainly.

"My being here is sort of a secret, Mrs. Bosmouth," she

confessed with deliberate candor. "I hope you'll not question me further as to the explanation."

"Oh!" There was a sympathetic note in the older woman's voice. "You don't have to explain. Everyone here is quite mysterious about who they are and what they're doing."

Mrs. Bosmouth laughed and Joyce joined her.

"Some time—perhaps when I see you again—I'll be able to tell you more and explain everything," Joyce promised vaguely. "I hope so, anyway. Well, I'll have to get back to field headquarters now, Mrs. Bosmouth. I've enjoyed very much talking with you."

Mrs. Bosmouth took Joyce's hand. As Joyce clasped the hand, she felt the woman's cold and moist skin. She wondered if the mention of the Barracuda could have caused Mrs. Bosmouth to grow so nervous.

After Joyce left, Mrs. Bosmouth hurried back to her plane to rejoin Carson. She found the pilot idly smoking a cigar, waiting for her.

"Well?" Carson inquired. "What did you learn?"

"Enough to confirm my hunch that this is a Secret Squadron base," she replied. "And more. I'm quite sure that this Rvan girl does not trust me. We will have to be watchful."

"Perhaps she is jealous of you," Carson said with a nasty chuckle. "I saw you tossing some of your sweet, motherly smiles at her boy friend. Women are quick to catch anything like that—especially when it's phony."

"Joyce may be young in years, but she's not so young

up here," Mrs. Bosmouth said, tapping her forehead with her finger. "The girl mentioned the Barracuda."

"*The Barracuda!*"

The amused expression on Jack Carson's face vanished with the mention of the master's sobriquet.

"What did she say about him?" he demanded tensely.

"She brought the subject up cleverly," Mrs. Bosmouth replied. "I think she was trying to pump me while I pumped her."

"Did you—did you—"

"I didn't give anything away, never fear," Mrs. Bosmouth assured him. "I pretended I had never heard the name before. But it gave me quite a shock. We shall have to be unusually careful, Jack. Joyce Ryan is suspicious of us!"

"What do we care," Carson said sullenly. "After all, we've accomplished our mission for the Barracuda. We've located the Secret Squadron."

"We were sent to find out how much Captain Midnight knows of the Flying Wing," Carla reminded him. "We haven't the slightest idea what he knows about that. Tomorrow we're to be escorted back to the mainland. That means if we run across Captain Midnight again he'll be doubly suspicious. We've got to find out more before we leave here, Jack."

Carson shook the ashes off his cigar. Looking toward the radio in the cabin of the plane, he nodded his head.

"We could risk a message," he suggested.

Carla Rotan tossed her head.

"That would never do," she replied. "Our carrier-wave would be heard. Captain Midnight has radio monitors listening constantly on the Barracuda's wave-length. A message from this island would instantly place us under suspicion. We'd be arrested before we contacted the Barracuda."

For some minutes Carla Rotan and her pilot talked in low tones, discussing plans and discarding them.

"It is plain that we are checkmated for the present, Jack," the woman decided at last. "We have learned only two things—that this island is a Secret Squadron base and that Captain Midnight has some plan about to be placed in operation so he is anxious to get us away from here. Nothing we can do, nothing we can say, will prevent him from sending us to the mainland."

"But we might have something to say about *reaching* the mainland," Carson suggested.

"That is just the idea that occurred to me, Jack," Carla said. "What could we do? How can we contrive to remain here?"

"Motor trouble?" Carson proposed, lifting his eyebrows.

Carla shook her head.

"It would only delay our departure and if trouble was too serious, we might be shipped to the mainland aboard another plane."

"Could we lose them on the way?"

Carla considered this proposal carefully.

"In bad weather we might, but not on a clear day."

Those pursuit planes could fly rings around us."

Carson glanced out the window of the cabin plane. The sun was sinking into the western Pacific. The skies were clear, except for a few fleecy clouds. The possibility of foggy or misty weather on the following day was remote.

"It looks as if we will have to rely on your lucky star, Carla," he said.

"Something *will* happen," the woman said. "I feel sure of it. We will give this Secret Squadron the slip. Then we can circle back to the island where we landed yesterday to meet Joyce and Chuck. We can hide there and watch Captain Midnight's movements. If he leaves we can follow him. Perhaps he will put us on the trail of the missing Flying Wing."

"That's the best plan we can make, I suppose," Carson said.

"We must watch our opportunity—we must let nothing pass that will give us a chance to escape from here," Carla insisted. "If we are caught, I can use that story about my brother again. Ah! My poor, dear brother, how useful you are to me!"

"Did you ever have a brother?" Carson asked skeptically.

"He is doing a life term for murder," Carla replied heartlessly.

A clanging from the mess hall announced that dinner was ready. Officers and men of the Secret Squadron were soon on their way to the building for their evening

meal.

Across the field came Chuck, who paused in front of the plane.

"Captain Midnight has asked me to escort you to dinner, Mrs. Bosmouth," he said.

Carla Rotan looked at Carson and smiled. Chuck Ramsay had inadvertently revealed the name of the Secret Squadron commander. That this was the Secret Squadron base no longer was mere guesswork.

Captain Midnight and Joyce did not appear for dinner. They planned to eat later with the men who stood watch while the others ate. While the regular dinner was being served, these two sat in the Captain's private office discussing the mysterious Mrs. Bosmouth.

"So she acted strangely when you mentioned the Barracuda, eh, Joyce?"

"Perhaps I imagined it, Captain Midnight," Joyce replied. "But I'm sure she was trying very hard to pry information out of me."

Captain Midnight nodded.

"If she is working for the Barracuda, her presence here can mean only one thing," he said. "The Barracuda is trying to find out how much I know about the Flying Wing."

"Well, he won't find out a thing from us!" Joyce pledged firmly.

"Still, he's diabolically clever," Captain Midnight said. "Of course, we may be wrong about Mrs. Bosmouth. She may not be sailing under false colors. But this is war-

time, Joyce, and we've got to be suspicious of everyone. Off she goes to the mainland tomorrow. You, Chuck, Ikky and I will follow for a short distance in my amphibian. Then we can break away and fly south, to look for the Flying Wing."

"What if she signals the Barracuda to intercept us?" Joyce asked.

"I've considered that possibility," was Captain Midnight's answer. "It's unlikely that she will, for fear of exposing herself. But if she does, our monitors here will intercept the message and warn us. She will be arrested immediately and turned over to authorities on the mainland."

"You manage to take care of everything, Captain Midnight," Joyce said with admiration.

"Not everything, Joyce," Captain Midnight denied grimly. "If I did, I'd have had this war won long ago. But if we all do our level best, there's no need to fear the outcome. Now we'd better run along to supper. We'll have to turn in early, because we must get an early start tomorrow."

As they reached the mess hall, they met Mrs. Bosmouth emerging, clinging to Chuck's arm and laughing merrily. Chuck seemed to be enjoying himself tremendously, Joyce observed.

Captain Midnight took Joyce by the arm.

"Let's not worry about Chuck, Joyce," he said. "Remember, Chuck's a young lad and he's very apt to be flattered by Mrs. Bosmouth, but underneath he's got

plenty of good sense. He'll be smart enough not to reveal any valuable information to an outsider."

Joyce laughed and waved at Chuck as she entered the mess hall with Captain Midnight.

"I'll bet she's trying to worm something out of him," she asserted to the captain.

"We'll see," said Captain Midnight, and his firm lips set into a grim line as he added in a very low voice: "The Barracuda should never be underestimated."

CHAPTER FIVE

THE FLYING SPY

The following morning, according to plan, a group of fighter planes prepared to escort Mrs. Bosmouth to the mainland. She was ready to accompany them—what else could she do? But Joyce noticed Mrs. Bosmouth made no statement that she would stay on the mainland.

Captain Midnight announced he would accompany the escort a short distance before flying on a "scouting" trip southward. Only his close friends, Joyce, Chuck and Mudd, knew that this trip was more than a mere reconnaissance tour, that it was, in fact, the beginning of a search for the missing Flying Wing.

Pilots and mechanics of the escort planes of the Secret Squadron completed their jobs of checking and fueling the planes, loading supplies and preparing for the departure.

Ichabod Mudd saw to it that the amphibian of Captain Midnight was loaded with an extra supply of fuel and provisions. In addition, an emergency camping outfit was stowed aboard. Mudd also found room for a spare propeller blade, tools and some extra motor parts. Joyce was glad Mrs. Bosmouth was not close by watching these preparations, for it would have been difficult to conceal from that shrewd woman the signs which

meant the amphibian was going on an extended voyage.

Mrs. Bosmouth had been placed in the custody of Chuck, who was to show her points of interest—and of military unimportance—at the base. When this task was completed, Chuck rejoined Captain Midnight's party.

"Mrs. Bosmouth says she won't need the escort all the way to the mainland, Captain Midnight," Chuck reported.

"It is best that she be escorted," the Secret Squadron leader said with finality, "*all the way*."

"She insists there is no danger," Chuck declared.

"She must rely on our judgment," Captain Midnight insisted.

"Of course the escort should go with her and watch her," Joyce asserted. "There's something mighty odd about that woman. I don't trust her—nor her pilot."

"Doubtless you're right," the Squadron leader said wryly.

Mudd, who had finished his preparations at last, suddenly paused and looked upward. He cupped a hand over one ear and listened, his eyes searching the sky to the west. At last he pointed upward and shouted:

"Cap'n! Cap'n! A plane's coming—a big one!"

At the same moment the air raid warning siren began to moan from the flight control tower. Gunners shouted from their posts. Motors of the scouting planes suddenly coughed and began to roar.

A voice from the watch tower, where a small telescope was located, called:

"A four-motored amphibian; four o'clock, sector nine; range seven miles."

Joyce heard the metal clank of a ratchet on a near-by anti-aircraft gun, indicating that it was fixing its muzzle on the target.

"Looks like the Barracuda!" Captain Midnight said. "Get in the amphibian, you three. We'll take off with the others. If it is the Barracuda and he bombs us on the ground, he could do a lot of damage."

The Secret Squadron pursuit planes already were starting to take off. Captain Midnight's plane took off among them and soon was circling with the formation. Joyce saw to her relief that Mrs. Bosmouth's plane was coming up to join the others in a leisurely fashion.

Joyce took her battle post in the co-pilot's seat of the amphibian, while Chuck and Mudd manned the defensive guns at the rear of the plane.

"I'm sorry this happened, Joyce," Captain Midnight said as his plane joined the formation of fighters heading for the mainland.

It was unnecessary for Captain Midnight to use a phone to speak to Joyce, for the cockpit was properly padded so that his words were not drowned out by the motor.

"Why?" Joyce asked. "Surely the Secret Squadron is a match for the Barracuda!"

"I don't enjoy seeing you mixed up in a fight," the Secret Squadron commander said gently.

"But I'm agent SS-3 of the Secret Squadron," Joyce

said with pride in her voice. "I expect to take the same risks other agents take. Besides, I can fight as well as any man in the outfit."

Captain Midnight's seriousness was broken with a smile.

"Joan of the Sky Ark," he teased with a broadening grin.

"A terrible pun," Joyce retorted.

But the jest had relieved the tenseness. Looking in the cockpit a moment later Chuck caught them smiling.

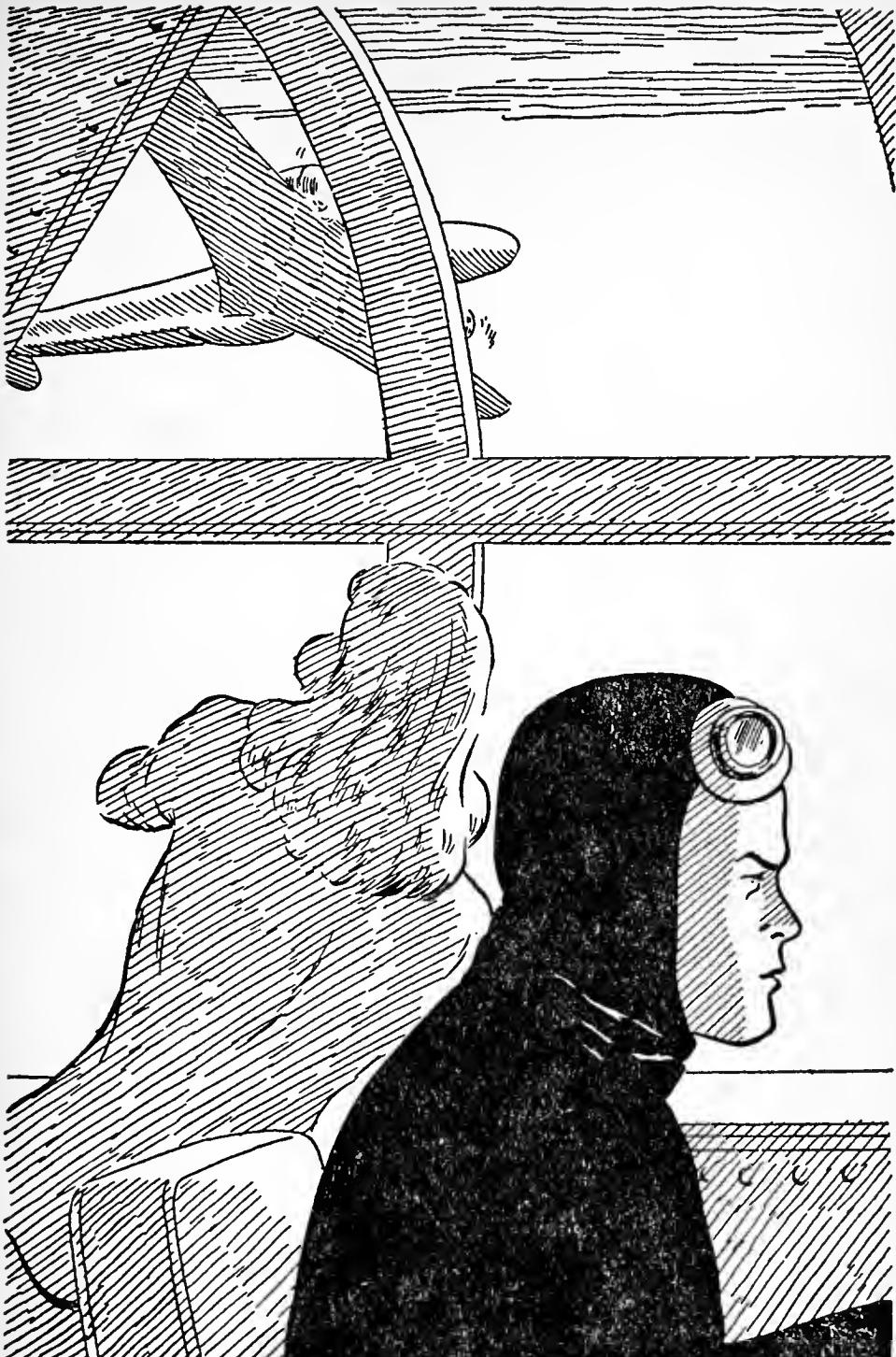
"Everything's set, Captain Midnight," he reported. "Ikky's watching our tail."

"Good!" Captain Midnight said. "Get back to your post and keep in touch with me over the phone."

Joyce tried to see the Barracuda, but the plane was behind them and the rear vision mirror did not pick it up. Then, as Joyce looked down, a black shadow on the water caught her eye. She looked up. Directly over the amphibian, and a short distance to the rear, was the four-motored ship of the Barracuda, the flying spy of the Pacific.

There was no mistaking the plane. Joyce had seen it before, and there were pictures of the sinister craft in the Secret Squadron identification room at headquarters. The rising sun insignia on the wings were clear evidence that it was an enemy ship.

But how had the Barracuda located the Secret Squadron base? Was it an accident? Had Mrs. Bosmouth radioed the information? Joyce ruled out the latter possibility, for Mrs. Bosmouth could hardly have signaled



There Was the Ship of the Barracuda

without the radio section of the Secret Squadron intercepting the message.

Joyce touched Captain Midnight's arm and pointed to the amphibian, which was slowly overtaking the Secret Squadron ship. Captain Midnight nodded. He already had seen the craft in his mirror—and he had seen more. Tiny specks—fighter planes—were following the large cabin craft of the Barracuda.

"It's an all-out attack on the Secret Squadron," Captain Midnight said grimly.

But the base had not been caught entirely by surprise. Tiny interceptor ships, with propellers twelve feet long, were rising to meet the attack. The Secret Squadron escort for Mrs. Bosmouth was swinging around ready to drive off the attack from the rear.

Captain Midnight followed the fighters. His plan was to stay with his pursuit ships until the enemy was beaten off. If he headed south now, the larger and slower craft would be an easy mark for guns of the Barracuda Swarm.

Although the enemy fighters were still some distance away, the Barracuda was almost within striking distance. Disregarding the Secret Squadron fighters, the four-motored ship had singled out Captain Midnight's bi-motored craft for attack.

Captain Midnight did not wait, but swiftly counter-attacked. Putting his large ship into a climb, the Secret Squadron leader sent a burst of machine-gun bullets upward. Tracers wove a pattern around the nose of the

monster aircraft and it banked sharply.

The strategy was apparent to Joyce. By attacking the Barracuda, Captain Midnight would not be open to an attack from the enemy fighter planes, for they could not shoot at the Secret Squadron craft without risking a hit on their own leader.

Captain Midnight tried hard to get his guns aimed at the four-motored plane again. Once within the sights of the smaller aircraft, the Barracuda would receive a devastating burst of fire. After that Captain Midnight would dive, raking the Barracuda from nose to tail with the guns manned by Chuck and Ichabod Mudd.

The Barracuda seemed to sense Captain Midnight's plan. The flying spy banked sharply. The enemy fighters, now getting within striking distance, had split into three sections and were closing in.

"They're concentrating on us!" Joyce cried excitedly.

But Captain Midnight was in grave peril.

As long as the fighters remained behind the Barracuda, the presence of the enemy leader afforded a shield for Captain Midnight's ship. But now, as the Swarm circled in toward Captain Midnight from below, they could attack from all sides, catching the Secret Squadron leader in a cross-fire that would almost certainly bring down his plane.

Captain Midnight made one last desperate attempt to catch the Barracuda in his sights. The moment the Secret Squadron leader touched the firing button the amphibian trembled with the recoil of the fifty-calibre guns.

The acrid smell of powder smoke came to Joyce's nostrils.

Instantly, the Barracuda's plane went into a vertical turn, escaping the deadly cone of fire. Whoever was at the controls of that ship was an expert—possibly the mysterious Captain Franz, one-time ace of the Kaiser's air force in the First World War.

Chuck's voice came over the intercommunication phone:

"Doggone it! I had him in my sights for a second, but he got away!"

Joyce caught a glimpse of a shadow moving across the waves below.

"Look out, Captain Midnight!" she cried in warning.
"The Barracuda Swarm is attacking!"

The time allotted for attacking the Barracuda was gone. One section of enemy planes had dived past the Secret Squadron machine, but Captain Midnight's maneuver to catch the Barracuda had saved him from getting caught in a deadly hail of bullets. A second group of the Swarm was moving in from the opposite direction.

A single Secret Squadron plane dived out of formation to attack the oncoming flight of the foe. Joyce recognized the craft as one piloted by Agent SS-43, a young Middle Westerner who only recently had joined the Secret Squadron.

The sudden attack had the enemy pilots at a disadvantage. One fighter limped out of the formation and

flew westward, losing altitude fast. But the Swarm recoiled and lashed back at SS-43.

A netting of tracers almost obscured the Secret Squadron plane. SS-43 wobbled and slid off on a wing. A moment later it was gliding toward the sea.

Joyce tried to tear her eyes away, but the sight held her gaze with a deadly fascination. The plane, out of control, seemed destined to crash on the water. The next moment the pilot seemed to regain control of the machine and it dropped down to float on the waves.

Joyce was tempted to ask Captain Midnight to help the pilot, but one glance told her that help was impossible. The bi-motored amphibian was fighting for its life now. Both front and rear guns were blazing.

A near-by Barracuda Swarm fighter suddenly burst into flames as it flew into the stream of bullets from the amphibian.

Captain Midnight, flying warily, managed to keep his craft out of the range of fire of the attackers. Still, tracers began to weave a deadly pattern around the cabin ship. One line of telltale smoke seemed almost to nibble at the amphibian's wing.

"You got one, Ikky!" Joyce heard Chuck shout into the phone.

The chattering of the machine guns in the rear of the plane did not slacken. Joyce caught a glimpse of a plane, marked with the rising sun, spinning into the sea.

As the third group of enemy planes attacked, Captain

Midnight banked again. For an instant an enemy plane loomed straight ahead of the amphibian. Once more Joyce felt the vibration of their guns. Then the enemy plane was gone.

Joyce leaned forward in an effort to catch a glimpse of the foe, but she couldn't see it. She didn't know whether Captain Midnight had brought it down or not.

At the sound of a crash close beside her, Joyce ducked. Immediately the back of her seat was showered with glass as a rain of bullets passed through the cabin. A burst of fire had lashed them without hitting a fatal spot.

Bravely Joyce straightened up in her seat. She looked at the chain of bullet holes in the glass just above her head. Inwardly she felt relief at the realization that she was still whole. Joyce was frightened, but it was the kind of fright that made her yearn to fight back. She wished fervently that she could trade places with Chuck and blast a few of the enemy out of the sky.

Uneasily Joyce became aware of an unusual quiet. The front machine guns had stopped firing. Chuck and Ikky had silenced them. In a tense instant of fear she surmised that the recent burst of enemy fire had caused this silence. She glanced at Captain Midnight, whose calm features reassured her.

"We've gotten rid of them for a few minutes," he explained, nodding his head to the left.

Joyce saw the Secret Squadron's fighters entering the battle. Now the enemy pilots had their hands full.

Planes were zipping, zooming, diving and rolling. The amphibian had a ringside seat for an aerial dogfight.

Suddenly some of the enemy planes broke away. They had had enough—the combat had drained them of ammunition and they were fleeing westward back to their base.

Captain Midnight spoke into the telephone.

"Both of you all right, back there?"

"I'm okay, sir," came Chuck's cheerful voice.

"So'm I," Ikky replied, "but I got my helmet ventilated by a bullet."

Captain Midnight turned to Joyce.

"Not a scratch," Joyce reported, answering the question before it was asked.

"Good," Captain Midnight said. "Did you notice what happened to the Barracuda?"

Joyce shook her head.

"I lost track of him during the battle," she confessed. "Too much going on."

"He must have vamoosed to save his own hide," Captain Midnight decided. "Secret Squadron pilots would have made things hotter for him than his Swarm made them for me."

Joyce suddenly remembered that SS-43 had been shot down. She told Captain Midnight, pleading:

"Can't you rescue him, Captain Midnight?"

"Certainly, if I can find his plane," the Secret Squadron commander declared.

A little later, Joyce saw something floating on the

water a couple of miles to the west.

"Look—I believe that's it," she cried.

Promptly Captain Midnight swung the amphibian around.

"The plane will stay afloat for awhile—until we can reach him," he said.

In a few moments the huge amphibian glided to the ocean close by the damaged little fighter.

"Ahoy, SS-43!" Captain Midnight hailed. "Are you all right?"

No answer came from the plane bobbing on the choppy sea.

Captain Midnight called again. Still no reply.

"Maybe he's wounded," Joyce suggested, "unconscious."

"Or captured," Captain Midnight said grimly. "I hope, if he was captured, that he was conscious enough to destroy the Secret Squadron Codograph—"

After throttling the motor Captain Midnight brought the amphibian alongside the smaller plane. Chuck climbed out on the wing and jumped to the smaller plane. The little pursuit ship rocked wildly on the waves, but Chuck managed to hold on. Cautiously the young Secret Squadron agent inched his way to the cockpit.

Chuck turned and called:

"He's gone, Captain Midnight!"

Captain Midnight's expression changed only for a fleeting instant.

"He's fallen overboard or been captured," he said. "All

right, Chuck. Come back. We can't risk getting caught here if the Swarm should return."

After the amphibian had taken the air again, Ichabod Mudd finished checking the plane. He reported there had been no serious damage.

"Only some busted windows and a few bullet holes," Ikky remarked. "The engines are all right and the controls weren't touched. We got off lucky."

Bullet holes could be plugged with plastics that were carried aboard the craft for just such an eventuality.

"What's on the program now?" Chuck asked.

"As long as we don't need any major rejairs, we shall proceed with our original plan," Captain Midnight said. "The pursuits probably have picked up Mrs. Bosmouth by now and are headed for the mainland. No use our sticking around here."

"I'd give a nickel to know what she thought about the battle," Joyce said half to herself.

Try as she would, Joyce could not remember having seen the woman after the fighting began, but the girl surmised that Carson had put as great a distance between himself and the flying bullets as possible as soon as the Barracuda attacked. Perhaps Mrs. Bosmouth wasn't a spy after all. The Barracuda certainly would not be likely to attack one of his own agents. Or would he?

Captain Midnight turned the amphibian southward. He was heading toward the area in which the Flying Wing had disappeared, realizing that he had a good

chance now to explore without molestation, while the Barracuda Swarm was elsewhere licking its wounds.

Besides, Joyce decided as she thought the situation over, the Barracuda Swarm would never look for Captain Midnight in the area south of the base. The natural supposition would be that Captain Midnight had followed his pursuit planes toward the mainland. But Joyce could not keep a small wriggling fear from her mind—what if the enemy did run across Captain Midnight? The cabin plane was not a match for enemy aircraft in force.

Joyce almost welcomed the sunset and the quickly gathering darkness of the tropical night. Within a short time the moon rose. Joyce settled back in her seat, relaxing as the amphibian soared southward, two miles high, on its quest for the Flying Wing.

Captain Midnight was relaxing too, for the automatic pilot could keep the plane on its course in this smooth air. The night was perfect and the air was like silk.

Joyce tried to sleep, but she was still excited from the events of the afternoon. Opening her eyes she gazed off into space.

A faint glint caught her eye. It wasn't the sea. Again, a sudden flash, not light, but a reflection of moonlight.

Something was in the air behind them reflecting the moonlight.

"Captain Midnight!"

The restrained tone of Joyce's voice brought Captain Midnight straight up in his seat.

"Yes, Joyce?"

"I saw a flash, like the moon shining on an airplane wing!"

"Where?"

Joyce pointed behind and to the right.

"Look—I can't see it now, but if it is a plane you'll see it!"

Captain Midnight watched silently.

"There!" Joyce exclaimed. "See it, Captain Midnight?"

Captain Midnight nodded.

"Yes, Joyce. It's a plane. Not large enough for the Barracuda's, but it might be one of his Swarm."

Slowly he turned. As the other craft followed, it was silhouetted for an instant against the moon.

"It's an amphibian, I believe," Captain Midnight said. "Maybe we can shake him off."

Captain Midnight throttled the motor and headed for a cloud bank directly ahead of the plane.

Entering the clouds, Captain Midnight turned sharply to the left. His plan was now clear to Joyce. Captain Midnight would fly some distance at right angles to his former course, and then go back on his course again. The maneuver should shake off the other plane if it was spying on them.

It was dark in the plane so Captain Midnight was flying by the luminous dials of his instruments. At last he moved the controls and the plane turned to the right again.

As the amphibian emerged from the clouds, Joyce looked around. The pursuing craft was not in sight, but, not far ahead, directly in the line of the Secret Squadron plane's flight, was an island!

CHAPTER SIX

RENEWING AN OLD ACQUAINTANCE

This island was altogether different from the low-lying coral atolls in the vicinity of the Secret Squadron base. This one was larger—perhaps ten miles long and a couple of miles wide—and it had high hills in the center. Along both sides Joyce could see numerous snug little quays, suitable for mooring planes or small boats.

"Just the spot we need!" Captain Midnight exclaimed.

"Then we're going to land," Joyce guessed.

"Yes," Captain Midnight agreed. "This is in the area where the Flying Wing disappeared. That island probably has fresh water, fish and some fruits. We'll make it our headquarters while we explore for traces of the missing plane. Besides, if we land now, we'll be able to throw off that other plane—which probably isn't expecting us to land on an uncharted island."

As the amphibian approached the island, the hills loomed large and bulky ahead. They were volcanic cones—in fact, the whole island was probably of volcanic origin, like hundreds of others in this part of the ocean. The Flying Wing, unless it had gone into the sea, would be found on some island like this.

The amphibian landed in a small bay on the east side of the island. Captain Midnight idled the engines and

taxied toward the shore. As the craft scraped the sandy beach, Ichabod Mudd jumped out and helped push it up on the shore, where he made it fast to a palm tree with a rope which he fastened to the struts of the plane.

Chuck assisted Joyce to the sand, and Captain Midnight followed.

"A pleasant little place!" Joyce exclaimed.

"I'll think more of it when I get something to eat," Chuck said.

"If one of you will build a fire and the rest bring some supplies and utensils from the plane, I'll cook some supper," Joyce volunteered.

Captain Midnight shook his head.

"No fire, Joyce," he said. "You'll have to use the hot plate aboard the plane—unless you'd just as soon have a cold supper. Can't risk a fire now—that other plane may still be in the neighborhood."

"A sandwich will be okay," Chuck said hungrily.

However, Joyce did put a coffee pot on the hot plate while she made sandwiches. Even in this tropical climate, hot coffee tasted good after a strenuous day. There was condensed milk and plenty of sandwich filling aboard.

Ichabod Mudd watched Joyce prepare the snack.

"After all," he said, "when you're hungry, even a few morsels taste like a feast. Why, I remember when I was a kid down in Arkansas there was only one piece of side meat in the neighborhood. One day we had beans for dinner. I tasted them and they didn't taste quite right."



"A Pleasant Little Place!" Joyce Exclaimed

" 'Ma,' I says, 'what's the matter with these here beans?'

" 'Jest go ahead an' eat 'em, son,' my ma tells me. 'Those there beans may be flat, but they're the best you'll get until Mrs. Merkey returns the side meat.' You see the whole neighborhood used it to flavor whatever they had to eat every day. We got so we had to have that same side-meat flavor in everything. But I was so hungry that day, I ate the beans straight."

Joyce, Chuck and Captain Midnight chuckled at Ichabod Mudd's droll tale.

The little group sat down on the sandy beach to eat sandwiches and coffee, the meal. Chuck and Joyce occupied a little space at the edge of the jungle, while Captain Midnight and Mudd faced them.

Hungry, they ate almost in silence, sipping the hot coffee between bites and listening to night calls of the birds.

Faintly at first a new sound rose out of the stillness. Growing louder it became a low buzz, like the hum of an insect. But South Sea island insects usually have no wings and often make no sound. The noise came from something else, for it was a man-made buzz.

"A plane!" Joyce cried.

There was no mistaking it now, as the noise grew louder. A plane was passing over the island. Could it be the craft which had followed the Secret Squadron amphibian earlier that night?

The wings of the Secret Squadron plane were silhouetted against the white sand of the beach and Joyce's

first fear was that the aircraft would be seen by the plane passing overhead. If the flying plane were an enemy scout it meant danger. But Joyce's fears were groundless. The plane came into view and flew southward without either slowing or changing its course.

"Were we seen, do you think?" Joyce asked anxiously as the plane passed.

"Don't know, Joyce," Captain Midnight replied. "I hardly think so, for the plane gave no sign. But it may return."

"Then what'll we do?" Chuck asked.

"Sit tight," Captain Midnight said, unruffled. "The plane might be a friendly one—a patrol plane of the U. S. Navy. If it isn't—" Captain Midnight shrugged "—well, it just isn't and the odds are even."

Before turning in, Captain Midnight assigned a two-hour shift of guard duty to each. Mudd, who had dozed on the first part of the trip, took first watch; Chuck, who also had had a nap, was second. Captain Midnight agreed to take the third trick, while Joyce was to guard last and prepare breakfast.

"If that plane comes back, call me," Captain Midnight directed as he stretched himself on the sand.

Chuck, taking some waterproof sheets from the plane, shared them with Joyce. The sand was damp, but the air was warm, and the weary girl of the Secret Squadron soon was fast asleep.

Joyce was awakened, not before dawn, but by the brightly shining sun. Flocks of birds of gay plumage

were circling overhead and a light breeze was rippling the shimmering waters of the lagoon.

Chuck was emerging from the jungle with an arm-load of wood to feed the fire burning on the beach not far away. Ichabod was expertly frying bacon over the fire and Captain Midnight was sitting on a log checking their position on a chart.

"Howdy, Joyce!" Ichabod hailed as he saw the girl aroused. "You were so tired that I had Cap'n Midnight call me to do your trick on guard. I hope you didn't mind?"

"Well—I guess not," Joyce said with a smile. "But I want it understood that you're not to keep me out of my share of the work just because I'm a girl."

"Don't worry," Captain Midnight said, looking up from his map, "There'll be plenty of work for everyone this trip."

After washing her face and hands in a little stream flowing into the lagoon, Joyce joined the others for a hearty breakfast of bacon and biscuits—tasty hot biscuits cooked in a Dutch oven under the coals of the fire. After the morning meal Mudd began to check the plane for possible damage in the aerial encounter, but he was unable to find any more scars than his first inspection had revealed.

Captain Midnight instructed the mechanic to look over the radio carefully, since it was the only connecting link between this party and Secret Squadron headquarters. It was not advisable to turn on the transmitter, for fear that

the carrier-wave might guide hostile planes to the island, but Mudd was able to check the instrument without turning it on. Both the transmitter and receiver seemed to be unharmed. The receiver would be used to listen to the regular Secret Squadron report at noon from the base.

While Mudd and the Captain were busy, Joyce and Chuck decided to explore. They entered the matted jungle of palms and tropical vegetation that lay beyond the beach and followed the stream inland.

The tropical island was extraordinarily beautiful. Vegetation, colorful and luxuriant, grew on all sides as they followed the stream to a small clearing where they sat down to rest.

Joyce inhaled the fragrance of the tropical flowers and closed her eyes. But she opened them again as to her ears again came a distant hum. The familiar sound recalled the events of the previous night.

The plane was returning!

Within a few minutes Chuck and Joyce spotted it through the opening in the trees.

"A bi-motored amphibian like Captain Midnight's!" Chuck said. "Probably the one that followed us last night. It'll spot ours in daylight, sure!"

The plane, flying at about five thousand feet, would pass directly over the beach where Captain Midnight's craft was located.

"Looks like Mrs. Bosmouth's!" Joyce spoke as she watched. "I wonder—"

"She ought to be nearing the mainland by now,"

Chuck reminded her.

"She wasn't very anxious to go," Joyce replied. "Maybe she turned back."

The plane suddenly banked and veered away from the lagoon. The pilot apparently had spotted the Secret Squadron amphibian on the beach.

"Hm-m! He doesn't like our company any more than we like his," Joyce commented.

The strange plane completed a half circle and made for the ridge. It was quickly lost from view as it passed to the other side of the island.

"Well, I guess that ends our exploring trip," Chuck said with disappointment in his voice. "Captain Midnight'll be worried if we don't show up right away. We'd better head back."

Joyce sighed. She didn't want to leave this pleasant spot either, but there was nothing else to do. She got spryly to her feet and followed her companion back along the stream toward the lagoon.

Chuck and Joyce had traveled farther than they realized. While the trip into the jungle seemed short, they seemed to walk miles before they reached the lagoon. The amphibian was alone on the beach.

"I wonder what's become of Captain Midnight?" Joyce said, as she looked at the deserted scene. Her eyes caught a glimpse of something on the far side of the plane. "Oh, there he is—OH!"

Joyce's voice broke off in a startled cry as she saw the figure emerge from the far side of the plane. It was not

Captain Midnight, nor Ichabod Mudd, but someone else. A woman dressed in flying togs!

Mrs. Bossmouth!

"Why, how do you do!" the woman said, spying Chuck and Joyce at the edge of the jungle. "Imagine, seeing you so soon again!"

Another figure came from behind Captain Midnight's plane—Jack Carson, Mrs. Bossmouth's villainous-looking pilot.

"Oh, hello!" he called. "Our old friends again, eh?"

Joyce collected her wits. After all, Mrs. Bossmouth was no one to be afraid of.

"You certainly gave me a start," Joyce said as she advanced toward the couple.

"So I noticed," Mrs. Bossmouth said, extending her hand.

Joyce again found the woman's palm cold and clammy.

"Certainly a coincidence, meeting you here!" Mrs. Bossmouth went on, apparently trying to impress the young people that it *was* coincidence.

But Joyce recalled the plane that had seemed to follow them the night before. The way that plane had stayed on Captain Midnight's tail was more than mere happenstance.

"Yes, we were beginning to think we wouldn't see any other human beings for a long, long time," Carson said, shaking hands with Chuck.

"It *is* strange, isn't it, Mrs. Bossmouth," Joyce said. "I thought you were going to the mainland with the other

planes."

"Oh, yes, we started out with them," Mrs. Bosmouth admitted, still smiling. "But we soon found out we were much safer flying alone than with your pilots. Please don't misunderstand me. I don't intend to cast aspersions on the pilots of the Secret Squadron—"

"Secret Squ—"

The quick exclamation came from Chuck, who broke off suddenly. Joyce was staring hard at Mrs. Bosmouth.

"Tell me, Mrs. Bosmouth," Joyce asked, "how did you know those men escorting you were Secret Squadron pilots?"

Mrs. Bosmouth laughed amusedly.

"Dear me, Miss Ryan! Surely you can see that my pilot and I both have ears. Besides, the reputation of the Secret Squadron is world-wide."

"And so is the reputation of Captain Midnight," Carson added.

"You seem very sure of yourselves," Joyce commented, wondering how much more this mysterious woman knew.

"Of course, dear!" Mrs. Bosmouth replied. "The instant he evaded telling me his name I suspected the truth. And I knew it when I was introduced to you, Joyce. Joyce Ryan of the Secret Squadron. And Chuck Ramsay! You've both made names for yourselves. And then—oh, it was rather funny! When Chuck came to take us to dinner after we arrived at the base he said *Captain Midnight sent him!* A slip of the tongue I don't think Chuck ever

did realize he made!"

Joyce looked accusingly at Chuck, who grew very red about the neck and ears.

"Chuck is always giving things away," Joyce said.

"Oh, don't blame him," Mrs. Bosmouth said. "It was a slip that anyone might make. Besides, from what I've heard, Chuck, and you too, my dear, have done more than enough to make up for the slip. Jack and I are glad we met you."

"Or we were, until we left that island yesterday afternoon," Jack Carson, the pilot, amended. "Then we realized that flying with Captain Midnight's Secret Squadron has its disadvantages."

"But if it had not been for Captain Midnight, I don't believe we would have escaped," Mrs. Bosmouth said. "Captain Midnight certainly handled his big cabin ship like a pursuit plane. He *almost* got the Barracuda."

"Yes, it was the Barracuda," Joyce said, watching Mrs. Bosmouth.

That was a slip of the tongue on the woman's part!

"You had told me about him, Joyce," Mrs. Bosmouth reminded her hurriedly as if to cover up the apparent revelation. "I knew the minute I saw that big four-motor-ed plane marked with the rising sun who the pilot was."

"I still don't understand why you didn't fly on to the mainland, as Captain Midnight told you to do," Chuck said.

"Oh, we started to," Mrs. Bosmouth hastily explained. "But we soon found out we were in no more danger

flying alone hunting for my dear lost brother than we would be flying to the mainland, so we turned back."

"How in the world did you happen to find us here?" Chuck asked, not unpleasantly.

Chuck seemed rather glad to see Mrs. Bosmouth again. Joyce, mildly exasperated, wanted to tip Chuck off to this unreliable woman's little tricks. Perhaps he was boyishly influenced because Mrs. Bosmouth was good-looking. Joyce hankered to take Chuck by the shoulders and shake some of such foolishness out of him.

"Well," Joyce reasoned, "I'll just let him make a fool of himself—then he'll be sorry." Then Joyce almost laughed as she realized she was being almost as silly. Chuck simply was flattered because an older woman, and a very beautiful one, was paying considerable attention to him.

"We ran into you quite by accident, Mr. Ramsay," Mrs. Bosmouth was explaining. "We were quite astonished when we flew over this island a short time ago and saw your plane on the beach here. To tell the truth, we were frightened at first—we thought it might be one of the Barracuda's planes. So we landed on the other side of the ridge and followed the beach over here to investigate."

"Have you found any trace of your brother?" Joyce inquired, trying to sound as though she did not doubt Mrs. Bosmouth's story.

"No," replied the woman. "But I keep hoping."

"I don't blame you for hunting," Chuck said. "I'd stick at it too, if I lost a brother down here."

"And what brings you so far off the beaten track?" Mrs. Bosmouth asked, directing her inquiry toward Chuck.

"Why—why nothing very important," Chuck replied uncomfortably. "Just a little reconnaissance."

"Dear me," said Mrs. Bosmouth with a little laugh. "I forget. One should not inquire too closely into wartime activities of the Secret Squadron. How long will you be here?" she went on, *still* inquiring.

Chuck was about to answer, but Joyce hastily interrupted:

"We really don't know, Mrs. Bosmouth. It depends a great deal on circumstances. I suppose *you're* here indefinitely, too?"

Watching Mrs. Bosmouth closely Joyce noted with satisfaction that the last remark had struck home. Mrs. Bosmouth's face clouded for an instant as if she was speculating on the extent of Joyce's suspicions. This young girl was annoying, to say the least.

"Yes, of course!" Mrs. Bosmouth replied. "But I have a good idea. Now that we all seem in danger from the Barracuda, why don't we join forces?"

"Sure!" Chuck agreed enthusiastically. Then a sudden thought struck him: "That is, if it is all right with Captain Midnight. We'll have to talk to him about it."

"Very well," said Mrs. Bosmouth. "Ask him. Now, Jack, I think we'd better start back to our plane. Drop over and say hello any time you feel like it, Chuck—and Joyce!"

Joyce watched Mrs. Bosmouth and Carson disappear over the ridge.

"Funny, isn't it, that we should meet them here?" Chuck asked.

Joyce turned to her companion. Her hands went to her hips in a position of censure.

"Chuck Ramsay!" she said vigorously. "Do you mean to stand there and tell me you can't see through that woman? Long lost brother, my eye! She's here to spy on us!"

"But she isn't a spy," Chuck objected. "She doesn't look like one!"

"Do you think spies are hired because they look like spies? Because she doesn't *seem* like a spy doesn't mean a thing. To me, her actions are plenty suspicious. I'll bet those two were up to something before we stumbled into them. Maybe they were inspecting our plane. They could have gotten out on the other side without our seeing them—"

"They couldn't have found anything," Chuck defended. "We've got our Codograph badges with us."

"They didn't know what they might find. The question is—why should they be so curious? I'm going to do a little investigating."

Joyce strode to the plane and looked inside. She turned around with a serious expression on her face.

"Just as I thought, Chuck! They've been rummaging in the plane!"

CHAPTER SEVEN

DIAMOND CUT DIAMOND

The evidence of snooping inside the cabin of the Secret Squadron plane was small, but to Joyce it was conclusive. Captain Midnight always kept his charts neatly folded in a small map case stored in a pocket behind his seat in the cockpit. Because the charts were important, he always took pains to put them away carefully after he had used them.

The precious map case now lay on the seat of the plane. Captain Midnight would never have left it there. Ichabod Mudd, likewise, would have put it away in its proper place. Chuck and Joyce had not been in the plane to disturb the maps. To Joyce it was quite evident that Mrs. Bosmouth had been looking at them.

"They really didn't hurt anything," Chuck said.
"There was no harm done."

"Just the same," Joyce replied, "I'm sure Captain Midnight wouldn't like to have them poking around in our belongings. Anyhow, *I* don't like the idea."

"But Mrs. Bosmouth seems to be straightforward about her lost brother, Joyce," Chuck insisted.

"She seems to be beautiful and that's an excuse for anything to an adolescent like you—"

"Adolescent? What's that?"

"An adolescent is a name for a young man who gives himself credit for grown-up brains, simply because he wears man-sized clothes. I saw you looking at Mrs. Bosmouth like a moonstruck cow!"

Chuck flushed at Joyce's stinging words.

"Aw, Joyce!" he said. "She isn't nearly as pretty as you!"

"That's just because I'm here and she isn't," Joyce replied. "Chuck Ramsay! I think you are a willy-nilly."

Chuck was growing angry.

"At least Mrs. Bosmouth doesn't go around calling me names!" he said tartly. "Adolescent! Willy-nilly!"

"Poor, *darling* Mrs. Bosmouth!" Joyce exclaimed. "Burdened with grief! Searching the seven seas for her long-lost brother! Who does she think we are to swallow a tale like that!"

Chuck, who had climbed into the plane behind Joyce, suddenly turned to leave. But as he did, the humor of the situation struck him. His anger vanished in a second and he turned, facing Joyce—laughing.

"Joyce," he said, "sometimes you're funny!"

Joyce tried to keep her dander up, but in the face of Chuck's laughter, her anger vanished. She joined him in laughing.

"Yes, Chuck," she admitted. "It *is* funny! We're both acting like a couple of babies. Anyone would think I was jealous of you and Mrs. Bosmouth!"

"That's why I'm not mad, Joyce," Chuck said. "I think you really were—kind of!"

Joyce's gray eyes began to spark again, but before she had time to reply, a footstep sounded outside the cabin ship.

"Hello there! Are you in the plane, Joyce and Chuck?"

Captain Midnight and Ichabod Mudd had returned.

The boy and girl climbed out of the plane to greet them.

"Captain Midnight!" Joyce exclaimed. "I'm certainly glad you're here. Mrs. Bossmouth and Jack Carson dropped in while we were away and I'm sure they were snooping around the plane."

Briefly relating what had happened, Joyce told the Secret Squadron leader about the displaced map case.

"Yes, Joyce," Captain Midnight said, "you're right. I remember putting that map case where it belonged just before I left." He paused and turned to Ichabod Mudd. "Queer, isn't it?"

"Pretty queer," the mechanic agreed, twisting his mouth into a sour grin. "I don't know just where we stand—now."

"I'm convinced Mrs. Bossmouth's a spy!" Joyce said.

"There may be some other explanation for her actions," Chuck insisted. "She might not have known whose plane it was. Maybe she was trying to find out."

"She saw the plane often enough at the base to recognize it," Joyce said. "Chuck is standing up for her just because she looks like a movie queen."

"I'll admit she's a stunner," Mudd said, winking at

Captain Midnight. "But that isn't what I think is queer."

"No," Captain Midnight said. "The odd thing is that she and her pilot should have been here at all. Yes, Chuck, I'm sure in my own mind that Joyce is right. If Mrs. Bosmouth isn't a spy, there's at least something mysterious about her and until we know her better it's best for us not to trust her too much."

"She knows about the Secret Squadron and that you're Captain Midnight," Joyce said. "Found out when she was at base headquarters, she said."

"She's alert—I'm not surprised she learned those things," Captain Midnight remarked with common sense. "After all, it's hard to keep everything a secret from someone on the spot. Even if she knows our identity there's no great harm done. Thousands of people know the Secret Squadron exists. There really is no evidence yet to warrant accusing her of being an enemy spy."

To see for himself, Captain Midnight climbed into the plane and examined the maps. They were all in the case, but he was apparently satisfied that someone had been going through his equipment, for as he returned to the beach, he smiled.

"Yes, indeed. Our remarkable Mrs. Bosmouth yielded to feminine curiosity and poked about a bit. But she was not unique in doing that. While she and Jack Carson were here, exploring *our* plane, Ikky and I were over the ridge going through hers. Turn about is fair play!"

Joyce and Chuck were delighted.



"Yes, Chuck, I'm Sure That Joyce Is Right."

"Captain Midnight always turns up where he is least expected," Joyce declared.

"Did you find anything, Captain Midnight?" Chuck asked.

The Secret Squadron commander shook his head.

"Nothing I could be sure about, Chuck," he stated frankly.

"We examined her plane license," Mudd said, "and there was absolutely nothing wrong with it."

"It *could* be phony," Joyce suggested with just a hint of a "wish" in her tone.

"Possible, but difficult," Captain Midnight admitted. "Forging a plane license is like forging a passport. It can be done, but you've got to go to an immense amount of trouble to do it."

"It would be worth considerable bother to learn what happened to the Flying Wing," Joyce pointed out. "I've a hunch Mrs. Bosmouth thinks we know more about it than we'll admit and she is trying to find out what we do know."

"You *are* suspicious, aren't you, Joyce?" Captain Midnight said. "That's all right, but there are Buts. The Flying Wing's test flight was a carefully guarded secret. Unless the enemy has news of its disappearance he is not likely to have the slightest idea what we are looking for. On the other hand, if the enemy caused the Wing's disappearance; why should he want to find out about it?"

Joyce shook her head. True enough, if the Wing had been made to disappear, the secret model probably was

in enemy hands. Yet—

"There's a small chance that something went wrong with the enemy's plans, Captain Midnight," Joyce said. "Maybe he had his hands on the Flying Wing, then lost it again. Now he is in the same position we are—he's *hunting for the Wing.*"

Captain Midnight, as always, gave full consideration to the hunches of his young aides.

"Plenty of sense in what you say, Joyce." He nodded. "I'd like to order a little investigation of this Mrs. Bosmouth and her pilot, but I don't dare use our radio right now to check her plane's license and identification numbers."

Ichabod Mudd bobbed his sensible head in hearty approval.

"Mrs. Bosmouth suggested that we join forces, Captain Midnight," Chuck informed him, rather abashed when the Secret Squadron leader echoed Joyce's suspicions.

"Not such a bad idea," Ichabod Mudd said then. "We could keep an eye on 'em better."

"And they could keep tabs on us," Captain Midnight observed quietly. "Still, we gain nothing by making them unwelcome here. I'd like to—well, know them a little better. As long as we're careful not to let them obtain too much information about us, I can't see why we shouldn't make them feel, once in awhile, that we're not unfriendly."

"I can do it," Joyce said, "but it'll certainly tax my powers of endurance."

Ichabod Mudd chuckled.

"That Mrs. Bosmouth certainly is a good-looker," he said. "But you needn't worry about her stealin' Chuck and me from you, Joyce. Cap'n Midnight's the one she's set *her* cap for."

"Ikky!" Joyce shrilled, laughing. "You're the one that's incorrigible."

At this moment, Captain Midnight looked at his watch.

"Well," he remarked, "we can resume this discussion later on. It's almost noon now—we must pick up the Secret Squadron radio report."

Quickly the four got into the plane. As Captain Midnight switched on the receiver, a crackle of static came from the loudspeaker. Precisely on the mark of twelve there was a hum from the distant generator at the Secret Squadron base.

"Here it comes!" Chuck said.

A faint voice spoke over the ether.

"SS-HQ calling SS-1. SS-HQ calling SS-1. Super code three. Super code three."

The designation "SS-1" applied to Captain Midnight as Secret Squadron Agent No. 1. The "super code three" was the designation for one of the numerous code combinations possible with the Codograph, the combined badge and coding device used by all Secret Squadron members.

The Codograph consisted of two dials, one inside the other. On one dial were inscribed the letters of the al-

phabet, scrambled rather than in order, and on the other were numbers from 1 to 26. By varying the positions of the dial, twenty-six different codes could be devised. Because of its small size, a Codograph was carried by every Secret Squadron member as a part of his identification. But members of the Secret Squadron had orders to destroy these codes before allowing them to fall into the hands of a non-member.

From a pocket Captain Midnight took his Codograph and adjusted the dial so that the figure 3 showed in the Code Designation slot. He nodded to Joyce who sat with pencil and paper ready to jot down the message as it was received from headquarters.

The call from headquarters was repeated once more: "SS-HQ calling SS-1. SS-HQ calling SS-1. Super code three. Super code three. Twenty-four . . . twenty-four . . ."

One by one the letters or numbers of the message came over the air to be jotted down by Joyce. As each number came, it was checked by Captain Midnight on his Codograph.

It was a short message. By the time it was finished, Captain Midnight had deciphered it from the numbers jotted down by Joyce.

His decode read:

"Advisable not to transmit important messages on present Codograph combinations until it is known if SS-43 and his Codograph have fallen into enemy hands."

"What does it mean?" Ichabod Mudd asked.

"It means that Kelly is on his toes at headquarters," Captain Midnight replied. "He has done what I should have done right after we found SS-43's plane empty after the battle with the Barracuda Swarm. SS-43 undoubtedly is now in the Barracuda's clutches. He could hardly have fallen out of the plane with his safety belt holding him. Wounded in the fight, he was probably rendered unconscious. The Barracuda could easily land beside him, take him from the plane and get possession of SS-43's Codograph!"

"Golly!" Joyce exclaimed in dismay. "That means we can't talk to the base without telling the Barracuda as much as we tell Kelly."

"Right!" said Captain Midnight. "Part of the hazards of the game."

The realization that the Barracuda had an important Secret Squadron possession had a sobering effect on the entire party.

"One thing we can and must do," Captain Midnight went on. "If the Barracuda has the code we must follow the rules of the Secret Squadron for just such an emergency. The safe course is to proceed on the assumption that the Barracuda has captured the Codograph. So our first counter-move is to send out an order to *discard* the present Codograph."

"Yes," Mudd said, "but we can't send out such a message from here."

"True enough," Captain Midnight agreed. "The Barracuda will be listening and decoding the message, but

that would not be particularly bad. What would endanger *us* is a tip as to our present location. A directional antenna could locate us—two directional antennae could triangulate our position almost exactly."

"But won't you have to send a message to headquarters to put the present Codograph in the discard and to place the Secret Squadron on the emergency code?" Chuck inquired thoughtfully.

The emergency code was one previously used by the Secret Squadron, but which had been supplemented by the Codograph. The emergency cipher had been memorized by all pilots for use only in the event that a Codograph fell into enemy hands.

"I'm going to send a message, but not from here," Captain Midnight elucidated. "I don't like to use up more gasoline, but there's no other way. We'll have to fly several hundred miles from this island, transmit the message, and then return here."

"But we only keep the emergency code in operation a week," Chuck said, puzzled. "How are we going to get a new code at the end of only seven days?"

"We have a new code, Chuck," Captain Midnight replied. "A new one which is as good, if not better than the old one, and it'll go into effect automatically a week after I send out the order canceling the present one. Mudd made the new code in his spare time at headquarters to be ready for just such a situation as this."

"That takes a big load off my mind," Chuck said, with almost comic assumption of responsibility.

"Do you have one of the new Codographs with you?" Joyce asked.

Captain Midnight shook his head.

"No, Joyce, and that's a difficulty," he explained. "The only copy is locked in the vault at headquarters. When I send my order through to Kelly, he'll have copies made for all Secret Squadron agents—"

"Except *us*!" Chuck supplied mournfully. "We won't be able to figure out our own messages."

"We'll find some way out," Captain Midnight declared confidently. "We'll have to keep up our search for the Flying Wing before it, too, falls into enemy hands."

Joyce suddenly had an inspiration.

"Why can't Ikky make us a copy of the new Codograph, since he designed it in the first place?" she asked.

"It's a tall order," Ichabod Mudd said. "But I guess I can. Only trouble is I've done so much other stuff since then that I've almost forgotten how it goes."

"If you can do it, Ikky, it'll save us a lot of grief."

"I'll try," he said. "Gimme some paper, Joyce."

Captain Midnight smiled—he counted heavily on Ichabod Mudd's prodigious memory and resourceful brain.

Joyce found paper and pencil for the mechanic who began sketching from memory the design for the new Codograph.

Meanwhile Captain Midnight prepared to make a flight four hundred miles eastward to send the order to

all outposts of the Secret Squadron which would render the old Codograph obsolete. Before the day was over, a machine would be set up to stamp out the parts of the new Codograph and, before the week ended, the new copies would be distributed by plane to all headquarters in the hemisphere. Agents would call for their copies at their division headquarters.

There would be a few delays in getting every agent supplied with a new Codograph, but in Captain Midnight's case the situation was different. The leader and his party were absent on a highly important mission. Their location was unknown to headquarters, and, even if it were known, it would not be advisable for a plane to fly from the base to the island to deliver a Codograph. The plane might be downed by enemy aircraft, or it might be followed by enemy scouts.

If Captain Midnight returned to the base for a Codograph he would be taking a grave risk. Or if he notified the base of his location, there was a possibility that he might also be telling the Barracuda where he was.

Captain Midnight realized that in sending out his order to discard the old Codograph he was taking some chance. The Barracuda was no ordinary spy and he might be able to guess at the position of Captain Midnight's party. To checkmate Captain Midnight would be a tremendous triumph for the Barracuda—one worth a high price in planes and toil.

In order to save precious fuel, Captain Midnight decided to make his trip alone. Ichabod Mudd would be

busy with the new Codograph while the Secret Squadron leader was away. Chuck and Joyce could easily occupy their time to good purpose. There was much of the island to explore in the possibility that some clue to the missing Flying Wing might be found.

After watching Captain Midnight take off, Joyce and Chuck set out on a trip to reconnoiter the area of the island on the other side of the ridge, in the vicinity of the lagoon where Mrs. Bosmouth's plane was beached.

The more she saw of the island, the better Joyce liked it. Chuck also grew enthusiastic as he pointed out large numbers of fish in the lagoons: the little Secret Squadron outpost need not worry about a food supply. Birds and vegetation were different from anything either had seen before.

They followed the shore line across the ridge and then to the north tip of the island. At that point they turned back, following the beach toward the lagoon where Mrs. Bosmouth's plane had been last seen.

As they came within view of the small inlet, they saw not a trace of Mrs. Bosmouth's plane.

Instead, riding at anchor, was a ship—a two-masted schooner!

CHAPTER EIGHT

WORD FROM THE LOST AGENT

Too surprised to utter a sound, Joyce and Chuck stared. Where had the schooner come from? How had it gotten here so mysteriously? What was it doing here? It was like seeing the Flying Dutchman appear before their eyes.

A sailor stood on watch near the bow, but there were no other signs of life. Joyce noted that the guard held a rifle in his hands.

"We'd better not go any closer," Joyce said, catching Chuck by the arm and drawing him back into the fringe of the jungle.

Chuck agreed with a nod of his head.

"Righto," he said. "That fellow with a rifle doesn't look too hospitable. Let's hurry back to our side of the island. Captain Midnight will be back by the time we get there and he'll be plenty interested in learning about this schooner and Mrs. Bosmouth's disappearance."

Cutting across the tip of the island they quickly reached the east side and shortly before six o'clock that evening they reached their lagoon.

Captain Midnight already had returned. Quickly Joyce told of finding the strange two-masted schooner at anchor.

"We'll have to find out more about that schooner," Captain Midnight said. "But we can do that later. It's almost time for the regular Secret Squadron report."

He switched on the receiver. Within a few minutes he was taking down a message in emergency code, which turned out to be simply a repetition of the order which Captain Midnight had sent during his trip over the ocean.

Kelly signed off and Captain Midnight reached forward to turn off the receiver. Suddenly the hum of a distant transmitter broke through on the Secret Squadron wave-length.

The volume increased sharply. Then a voice spoke:

"SS-43 calling SS-1. SS-43 calling SS-1. Super code two. Super code two." There was a pause and then the voice continued: "Ready. Twenty. Nine, Five....."

Slowly and distinctly the message came to Captain Midnight, who jotted the figures down on paper. At the end the message was repeated. Then SS-43 signed off.

"Loopin' loops!" Chuck exclaimed. "News from SS-43! And we thought he was lost."

"It doesn't seem possible," Captain Midnight mused. "His plane was empty and he surely couldn't have swum ashore from where he was shot down—but I'll check this message."

Captain Midnight swiftly deciphered the message he had just received. When he finished he read:

"SS-43 to Captain Midnight. Have picked up trail of



“News From SS-43!” Chuck Exclaimed

Flying Wing. Awaiting orders."

Captain Midnight turned to the others.

"What do you make of it?" he asked.

"Pretty fishy," Joyce commented.

"Yes, it doesn't ring true," Chuck agreed.

"Them's my sentiments, too!" Mudd echoed.

"That's what struck me," Captain Midnight spoke solemnly. "The news in this message is just too good to be true."

"Why, even a child could figure out that it wasn't true," Joyce said. "First, how did SS-43 escape from his plane after he was shot down? Second, why didn't SS-43 use the emergency code according to orders, instead of falling back on the old Codograph cipher? Third, where did SS-43 find a transmitter?"

"Those are legitimate questions, but still there's a chance that the message might be genuine," Captain Midnight maintained. "We don't know how SS-43 got away from his plane after it was shot down, but we can't say it wasn't possible. He may not have heard my order this afternoon and didn't have time to decode Kelly's message tonight. And there's a chance that he could have gotten hold of a transmitter."

"We've got to know more," Joyce said. "It looks as if we'll have to make another trip to sea, Captain Midnight, and ask SS-43—or whoever it is—some questions."

"I guess we've enough gasoline to spare," Captain Midnight conceded. "I'm reasonably sure the message is a fake, but we can't take a chance. I think I know how

to make sure."

It was growing dark now and, with the strange schooner on the other side of the island, Captain Midnight deemed it advisable for all hands to go with him on the trip.

Within a few minutes the amphibian took off. This time, however, the amphibian sailed eastward, in the opposite direction from that traveled by Captain Midnight on his afternoon flight.

As soon as the amphibian was in the air, Captain Midnight turned the controls over to Joyce, while Chuck and Ichabod Mudd manned the machine guns to guard against a surprise attack. The plane sailed swiftly over the sea. Captain Midnight kept track of the time and the air speed. When his calculations indicated a flight of two hundred miles, he switched on the transmitter and sent a message of seven words in super code eight to SS-43.

The message was:

"WHAT IS YOUR POSITION? REPLY EMERGENCY CODE."

Captain Midnight switched off the transmitter and turned on the receiver.

"That ought to get some results," he declared. "If we get a reply, we'll know it is actually SS-43 sending—although we won't be sure under what conditions. SS-43 knows the emergency code. But if no answer comes we'll know the first message was a fake."

Joyce smiled grimly as she swung the amphibian back

toward the island. The Barracuda had played a good card, but Captain Midnight had played a trump!

For some little time Joyce circled high over the ocean at ten thousand feet. Chuck and Mudd kept their eyes open, guarding against approaching planes, while Midnight waited for the answer to his message.

No answer came.

"I think that should prove who sent the first message," Captain Midnight said quietly. "If SS-43 received our message he certainly would have had his answer coded and sent by this time."

"Shall I head back for the island, Captain?" Joyce asked.

"Might as well," the Captain said. "It's two hundred miles west—" He broke off suddenly. "Why didn't I think of that!" he exclaimed.

"What's the matter?" Joyce asked.

"On the first flight, when I sent a message to headquarters, I flew four hundred miles west," Captain Midnight said. "On this we flew two hundred miles east."

"Yes, but what difference does that make?"

"Don't you see? If the Barracuda triangulated the two positions he could draw a line between them and that line would pass directly through our island!"

Joyce's face clouded.

"Do you suppose he did?"

"I don't know," Captain Midnight answered. "But we've got to take a chance. We must return to our island, because there are things going on there that I

have to investigate—the schooner for instance. Someone may be aboard her who has seen the Flying Wing."

A bright moon shone over the lagoon as the amphibian returned to the island. The plane landed on the beach and within a few minutes was anchored securely against sudden windstorms in the night. The guard was to be maintained as usual, especially since it was known that a strange schooner was anchored across the island.

The following morning, Captain Midnight joined Ichabod Mudd in working out the new Codograph while Joyce and Chuck continued their explorations.

Ichabod's work on the Codograph now had passed the paper stage and he had transferred his activities to the little workshop in the rear of the amphibian.

"It's gonna be a tough job, Cap'n," Mudd announced as he inspected his sketches of the previous afternoon.

"You won't let it lick you, Ikky," Captain Midnight said. "You've got six full days to get the new Codograph worked out. That should be plenty of time."

"My plans look okay, but I know they ain't quite right," the mechanic objected.

"What's wrong with them?" Captain Midnight asked.

"Well—"

Mudd hesitated.

"Well?"

"Tell you th' truth, Cap'n, I don't think I'm started out right. You see, the new Codograph starts with one combination of numbers and letters. That's the first code. From that you can build your second code with a com-

bination of different numbers and letters and from there you can make a third, and so on, until you have six different codes. That means that the first code has to be absolutely right. If it ain't, then none of the others'll be right either."

Captain Midnight inspected the sketch drawn by Ichabod Mudd.

The mechanic had given the letter A the number 12.

"Do the other numbers follow right around?" Captain Midnight asked. "I mean is B number thirteen, C fourteen, and so forth?"

"You know me better than that!" Mudd exclaimed. "I didn't do it that way on the first Codograph and I won't on this one either. That'd be too easy to figure out and the Codograph wouldn't be very secret. I scrambled the alphabet. That's one reason why I forget how I made the bloomin' thing. I've forgotten how I scrambled it. Scrambled eggs got no pattern, see?"

"Oh!" Captain Midnight nodded. "Now let's see. The numbers, of course, are in order—1, 2, 3, 4, 5, and so on. But the letters aren't in sequence. You start with A, but instead of following with B, you jump over to Q or some other letter—"

"That's it!" Mudd said. "That makes it hard for anyone to figure out a message without a Codograph. Now, I've got to make sure if what I've worked out is O. K. I'm wondering, did I give the letter A the right number?"

"Think hard!" Captain Midnight urged.

"I figure I'm right," Ichabod Mudd said, scratching his

head, "but I'm not positive. There's one way I might check. It may work and it may not."

"It won't hurt to try. What is it?"

Ichabod Mudd spread his sketch before him and studied it.

"Well," he said, "when Kelly and I figured out this code, I fixed a certain rotation and we followed that rotation for all the different combinations. I ain't certain that I remember what the letter A was, but I'm pretty sure about three other letters. Looky, Cap'n!"

Ichabod Mudd wrote the letters M-U-D-D on a slip of paper.

"Your name," Captain Midnight said, smiling.

"Yeah. My name's Mudd," the mechanic admitted with a comically sober face. "After we figured out the code, I wrote my name in the primary cipher and it sorta stuck in my mind."

The mechanic jotted down the numbers 7-17-1-1 beneath the letters M-U-D-D.

"That's the clue we've been looking for!" Captain Midnight exclaimed. "Do you think you can figure out the rotation from those three? You would have to have a name with only three different letters!"

"I can't help my name," Ichabod said sadly.

"Well, three letters are better than nothing," Captain Midnight smiled. "We'll try to work out the combination from this."

Through the morning they worked. At noon Captain Midnight listened in for the headquarters report and

heard Kelly notifying all bases that SS-43 had been captured by the enemy. Kelly had assumed the same thing that Captain Midnight had deduced when no reply came to Captain Midnight's message.

Chuck and Joyce, meanwhile, had been exploring toward the center of the island. The little Pacific paradise would have been a delightful vacation land, if the young friends had not had so many serious things to worry about.

During the exploration they had come upon a little inland lake nestling between volcanic cones in the center of the island. Chuck believed this might be a good place to land the amphibian if it became advisable to move it off the beach.

"It's better concealed than the harbor," Chuck pointed out.

As they came nearer the lake, they perceived other advantageous features. Along the east side was a clear space, large enough to use for a land plane. The amphibian could be brought down either on the water or on the field. The lake side would be ideal for Captain Midnight's headquarters during the search for the Flying Wing.

The trees of the jungle afforded many good hiding places for the plane and its crew.

"Do you think the landing field is big enough?" Chuck asked.

"I've seen both you and Captain Midnight fly out of smaller fields than this," Joyce averred. "Anyhow the

amphibian could use the lake in a pinch."

"If a good wind was blowing from the right direction—that'd be west—the field would be swell."

"That's where the wind's from now," Joyce said. "It blows that way most of the time. It's the trade winds, or prevailing westerlies, or something."

"Then the field's perfect."

The two set about examining other aspects of the field in the center of the island. The spot seemed ideal to Joyce, who already was deciding where to put the tent, where to build the fire, and where to hide the plane.

As Joyce looked around her eyes were drawn to the treetops at the end of the field, where the jungle ran down to meet the lake. Something about those trees struck her as odd. They didn't look like the others.

Suddenly Joyce realized what made them look strange. Long ago the tops of these palms had been broken off.

"What's the matter, Joyce?" Chuck asked. "What are you staring at so hard?"

"Those trees, Chuck. Look at them!"

"Yeah? What's the matter with them? Funny-shaped, is all."

"They've been broken off," Joyce pointed out.

"Maybe a tropical storm did it," Chuck suggested. "They have whoppers in this region."

"A tropical storm would break *all* of them," Joyce explained. "So it couldn't have been a storm—only a few of the trees are broken. Looks like a cannon or some-

thing had been fired right into the middle of that clump."

"I doubt if there has ever been a cannon fired on this island," Chuck asserted.

"Anyhow," Joyce said, "something hit those trees high up in their top branches."

"Okay, but we've enough mysteries without hunting around for more. And hadn't we better start back for camp pretty soon? It's going to be late before we know it, and there isn't any twilight in this part of the world —the sun goes down and right away it's night."

Joyce nodded.

"Okay. Let's turn back."

She didn't move, however. The girl was still wondering about those trees. It was disturbing how they mystified her. Almost intuitively she sensed that those broken tops were somehow extremely important. Woman-like, Joyce felt a persistent urge to get at the answer.

"I'm positive I'll hit on the solution if I think hard enough," she murmured.

"Are you going to stand there the rest of the afternoon looking at those busted trees?" Chuck said, kidding impatiently. "Anyone would think you'd never seen a tree with a broken top before."

"There's something more than strange about 'em—I've never seen any exactly like that," Joyce insisted stubbornly.

"Oh, yes, you have," Chuck told her. "I remember some trees just about like those—not palms, but some



“Something Hit Those Trees,” Joyce Said

other kind."

"Where?"

"You should remember 'em too. They were along that lake in Wisconsin where that plane of Ivan Shark's crashed one night—"

In a reminiscent flash Joyce recalled how the plane had dived right into a grove of trees splintering the tops and lopping them off like a giant scythe.

Yes, there had been a resemblance, except that these were palm trees. Such a crash here had occurred a long time ago, for new branches had shot out from below the broken spots in the trees.

Then came the spark that set off the idea. Joyce's eyes lighted up.

"Chuck! I've got it!"

"Got what?"

"Those trees!"

"Yeah? Got 'em on the brain. Well, I'm glad if you've solved the mystery!"

"But it's important, Chuck," Joyce exclaimed. "I'll bet an airplane hit those trees trying to land or trying to take off from this field!"

CHAPTER NINE

BIRDS OF AN UNPLEASANT FEATHER

Although the Barracuda had captured SS-43 in his attack on Captain Midnight's island base, the renegade spy had lost a great deal more than he had gained. Five of his planes had been damaged. An attack so costly was one which he would not try to repeat.

His single captive, SS-43, except for yielding up the now-useless Codograph, had given him virtually no information. The Barracuda had not put a great deal of faith in his forged message to Captain Midnight. It had been a shot in the dark, but such shots are sometimes successful. This one had not been, for Captain Midnight had rendered the old Codograph obsolete even before he received the false dispatch.

Other troubles were besetting the Barracuda. His ace spy, Carla Rotan, disguised at Mrs. F. W. Bosmouth of Boston, had completely dropped out of his ken. The Barracuda had seen her winging away to the southward during the attack of his Swarm on the Secret Squadron. All his pilots knew her plane and would not attack her, but up to now he had no inkling of her whereabouts or whether she had reached a safe haven. There was even the possibility that she had been arrested by the Secret Squadron. Captain Midnight was no fool and

Carla's disguise was by no means perfect.

The reason for Carla's silence would not have been hard to understand, had the Barracuda known the facts. Carla realized that the Secret Squadron had men assigned to the interception and translating of all messages transmitted on the Barracuda's wave-length. If she attempted to communicate with the Barracuda she would be exposing herself in the same way that Captain Midnight exposed himself when he communicated with his headquarters. Carla had no desire to increase her chances for arrest as a spy. Thus far she had learned nothing to indicate that Captain Midnight intended to stay on the island and use it as a base in his search for the Flying Wing. When she had definite information about that, she intended to let the Barracuda know.

The Barracuda, like all egoistic dictators of their own little worlds, was impatient. Judging others by his own unscrupulous standards, he attributed Carla's silence to treachery. Carla, he decided, was trying to obtain information about the Flying Wing and selling it herself to the Tokyo gangsters, or to anyone else who offered a good price. Nor was the Barracuda far astray in his estimation of Carla Rotan. She would, if she could, betray the Barracuda. But unmistakable risks were keeping her honest thus far in the game.

Suddenly, out of the confusion, came a faint beam of hope. The Barracuda's agents, triangulating the messages sent by Captain Midnight to his headquarters, had pounced upon a clue.

The messages had been sent six hundred miles apart—showing that wherever Captain Midnight was at the time he radioed, he was certainly not at the point he was using as his base. Conclusion: Captain Midnight had flown from his hiding place to send the messages.

The Barracuda knew the elementary mathematics that two points make a straight line. What would be simpler than for Captain Midnight to fly in one direction to send the first message and in the opposite direction to send the second?

"Captain Midnight must think I'm more stupid than he!" the Barracuda told Captain Franz gloatingly as he explained his deduction to his lieutenant. "See, Franz. There is a very good chance that we can uncover Captain Midnight's true hiding place simply by flying along the line between the places where he sent those messages."

Captain Franz adjusted his monocle.

"Why, of course, Your Excellency! You are clairvoyant!"

The Barracuda rubbed his hands over his mental achievement.

"Tomorrow," he said, "we will find Captain Midnight."

Early the next day the huge four-motored amphibian plane manned by a picked crew of the Barracuda's Swarm, carrying the Barracuda and Captain Franz, flew swiftly away from the mysterious little island in search of Captain Midnight's temporary base. The flight was pri-

marily a scouting expedition. Once Captain Midnight was located, a squadron of the Barracuda Swarm could sweep down on the Secret Squadron leader and wipe him out, or take him prisoner. If Captain Midnight's position were not well defended, the Barracuda might attempt the task himself, without delegating it.

If the position were too strongly defended, the Barracuda would learn what progress the Secret Squadron had made in tracing the missing Flying Wing before ordering the attack.

The amphibian flew for almost an hour without sighting anything that looked like a hiding place for Captain Midnight and his friends. Then at last the Barracuda sighted a small volcanic island directly ahead of his plane.

It was a fair-sized island, compared with the coral isles to the north, and it had a high ridge through the center which flanked the cones of the volcanoes that had long ago formed the island. The interior was covered with jungle growth.

"This is it!" the Barracuda said, confidently.

His eyes swept the scene below. Suddenly he smiled. Lying in a little bay on one side of the island was a bi-motored amphibian.

"Captain Midnight's plane!" he cried.

"He is alone, and off guard!" came Captain Franz's low voice.

The Barracuda signaled his pilot, who seemed to sense his chief's intention. The four-motored plane went

into a dive. From the wings came bursts of machine-gun fire sweeping the water near the anchored plane.

The huge ship nosed up.

"Strange!" remarked the Barracuda. "It's not like Captain Midnight at all! Why doesn't he show some fight?"

"Careful, Your Excellency, it may be a trap!" Captain Franz warned.

The large cabin plane circled while the Barracuda watched the smaller amphibian anchored in the lagoon. No sign of resistance appeared.

"Perhaps we can capture him without help from the Swarm," the Barracuda mused. "I should like to question him about the Flying Wing—perhaps his presence here has something to do with that valuable craft." The wily executive of the international espionage ring lifted a phone to his lips and addressed the pilot:

"Land in the harbor, but keep your guns trained on that plane."

The four-motored aircraft nosed down once more. The plane's guns were trained on the bi-motored ship, helpless on the water below.

Captain Franz shook his head.

"I can't understand it. Captain Midnight—over-confident as he is, would never let us catch him by surprise."

"He was bound to grow careless sooner or later," the Barracuda declared in a bullying tone. "Now that he is at our mercy, all of the fight has gone out of him."

The deserted amphibian was still without a sign of

life as the Barracuda's plane struck the water. But no, there was someone on board—someone was standing in the open door of the cabin. Yet this person gave no indication that the bi-motored machine intended to protect itself.

"Fire across the plane's nose with the port machine gun, Captain Franz," the Barracuda ordered his lieutenant.

"Yes, sir."

Captain Franz aimed the weapon and sent a short burst of fire as a warning toward the other ship. Tracer bullets passed directly across the nose of the amphibian.

Still no retaliation or acknowledgment came from the plane.

The four-motored ship came to a stop with its nose pointing broadside at the other craft.

Again the Barracuda spoke into the telephone.

"Attention, rear compartment! Make ready the collapsible boat!"

"Aye, aye, sir!" was the reply.

The giant amphibian had stopped now, and the figure in the doorway of the smaller plane stepped into full view. It was a man dressed in a pilot's uniform. He raised his hands in token of surrender.

"He gives up without a struggle, Your Excellency!" Captain Franz exclaimed in amazement. "It is unbelievable!"

But an expression of disappointment had crept into the Barracuda's face.

"Yes, Captain Franz, but that is not Captain Midnight! I cannot recognize him at this distance, but he is a shorter and less stalwart man than Captain Midnight."

"Perhaps he is one of Captain Midnight's men," Captain Franz said.

The collapsible boat was launched and in it the Barracuda and Captain Franz, accompanied by a member of the crew armed with a sub-machine gun, approached the bi-motored ship, their little craft propelled by a small out-board motor.

The man still stood in the doorway with his hands above his head.

As the small boat neared the bi-motored plane, the Barracuda called out a warning:

"Do not attempt to resist and don't try any tricks. We are armed and we will not hesitate to shoot."

"Never fear," came the reply. "We won't try anything."

As the man spoke he stepped aside and a woman appeared behind him.

A gasp choked in Captain Franz's throat.

"A woman—"

But there was no gasp of amazement from the Barracuda. Instead there came a chuckling laugh.

"Ha! Look who is here! Not Captain Midnight; not our enemies but Carla Rotan!"

The woman spy did not join the laughter. She stood in the doorway defiantly, glaring at the master spy of the Pacific.

"May I ask you, Your Excellency, just why you fired at me a few minutes ago?" Her voice was sharp with indignation.

"It was all a mistake, Carla, my dear. We mistook you for Captain Midnight!"

"I do not believe it! Surely you recognized my plane as I recognized yours! I made no move of hostility. You were trying to kill me—"

Amusement creased the Barracuda's face.

"Your words betray you, Carla," he said. "You and Carson have been up to something. Your conscience is guilty. You forget I am a psychologist, the author of several papers on the subject. Your questions are designed to put me on the defensive—to prevent me from learning what you have been doing. Why have you not communicated with me since you left my island?"

"There was no opportunity! Besides, I do not have to submit to a cross-examination. I have done nothing wrong!"

"But I am anxious to receive your report, Carla. Come. Tell your man to lend me a hand. I am coming aboard your plane."

As the Barracuda entered the cabin, Carla Rotan faced him in stony silence.

"I have done nothing to deserve your suspicions, Your Excellency," she said. "I have been guilty of no treachery."

"Only in thought, my dear!" There was a taunt in the Barracuda's voice.

"Let us dispense with jokes," Carla replied. "I have followed your orders to the letter. The only reason for not communicating with you was the danger of exposing my position to the Secret Squadron." Carla paused and added with a smile, "I would be a fool not to obey your orders."

"Perhaps I am wrong, Carla," the Barracuda said with heavy grace. "Now tell me what you have accomplished. Is Captain Midnight here on the island?"

"He was until yesterday," Carla revealed. "Today he is gone from his camp on the other side of the island, but perhaps he is still in the vicinity. I think maybe he has a hiding place elsewhere on this island, although I have been unable to find it."

"Is he searching for the Flying Wing?"

"I believe so. Otherwise he would not have left his base," Carla said. "However, he is very reticent about why he is here. I don't *know* that he is searching for the Flying Wing, but I believe he is here on an *important* mission."

"Why do you believe this?"

"A young man in his party—Chuck Ramsay—"

The Barracuda nodded.

"I know him."

"The boy is very clever at keeping secrets, but I was able to trick him into making some interesting revelations. The very first day I met him, he accidentally revealed that I had successfully reached the Secret Squadron base and had met Captain Midnight. I believe I

can lead him into telling me more."

"There is a girl, too. Joyce—"

Carla's face clouded. "She is rather more difficult," she confessed. "I think she suspects me. When I am with her I must be continually on my guard. She is as dangerous as Captain Midnight."

"Work on the boy, then," the Barracuda ordered. "It is unnecessary for me to remind you that there is a fortune for us to divide if we discover where the Flying Wing has landed. I pledge my honor that you shall have your share. Because you have established contact with Captain Midnight and his party, you can learn facts of great value if you apply yourself."

"If Captain Midnight should learn of your visit to my plane, it would do our plans no good," Carla reminded the Barracuda.

"He will not find me here," the Barracuda replied. "I shall leave at once. But there is a little task which I desire you to attend to—if you can. Some time ago one of Captain Midnight's pilots fell into our hands and we obtained a little device for coding and decoding messages. Unfortunately we made a move that disclosed our possession of this and Captain Midnight was forewarned."

"Stupid of you," Carla criticized.

"Eh? Stupid? It will be well for *you* not to make stupid moves yourself," the Barracuda retorted angrily. "Never mind what *I* did. The fact remains that Captain Midnight has been using another code since that time. I trust

you will be able to get me the key to that code."

"Very well," Carla said. "I shall coax it out of Chuck Ramsay. Yes! I can obtain the secret right under Captain Midnight's nose!"

"You will steal his decoder?"

"That would be too crude, Your Excellency," she declared. "Besides, how do we know he has one? I shall use another method."

"I'll leave it to you, Carla," the Barracuda decided. "But you must act immediately. It is possible that the code being used now is a temporary affair and will be replaced soon by another permanent code. In that case you must arrange to get the permanent code."

Carla smiled.

"I will get it," she promised confidently.

"And meanwhile watch Captain Midnight," the Barracuda continued. "Let him find the Flying Wing and then we will take it from him. But I shall have to hear from you occasionally."

"I will communicate," Carla replied. "But I will take no risk of having my messages intercepted by the Secret Squadron."

"Since I shall not be far away, it won't be necessary for you to use a great deal of power on your signals," the Barracuda said. "The monitors at the Secret Squadron base need not hear them at all."

The Barracuda turned to go.

"I am glad to see that you trust me again, Your Excellency," she said coolly.

"It is well that I do trust you, my dear," the Barracuda replied with a warning note in his voice. "Remember, do not attempt to double-cross me. You will find it very unhealthy."

The Barracuda's lips curled in a smile that sent a chill through Carla's veins. But the woman was no weakling —she smiled back and escorted the spy to the cabin door. Captain Franz followed his chief to their places in the collapsible boat.

In good spirits the Barracuda reentered the cabin of his amphibian plane. Carla was doing much better than was to be expected. She had made progress with Captain Midnight and through Chuck Ramsay she might tap rich sources of vital information.

"Where next, Your Excellency?" Captain Franz asked for orders. "Shall we return to our base?"

"I propose that we stay here awhile," the Barracuda said, lighting a long, Oriental cigaret. "If Captain Midnight remains on this island, Carla will find his hide-out and she will discover the key to his message code. Then we will strike! We will find the Flying Wing and our reward will be great!"

"Unless those Japs decide to pay us in that 'stage money' they are circulating in the conquered countries," Captain Franz observed dryly.

"If they should, we will be glad to sell Jap secrets to the Allies, my dear Captain Franz!"

Captain Franz nodded. An outlaw spy has no unwavering allegiance, except to gold.



"Do Not Try to Double-Cross Me," Said the Barracuda

"However, I think it best that we leave this harbor," he said, nervously. "Captain Midnight may see us here. He wouldn't pass up a chance to fight us—"

"I see! You are afraid of Captain Midnight," the Barracuda snarled.

"Let's not take chances, Your Excellency," Captain Franz pleaded. "I fought against Americans at the Meuse and the Argonne. I learned to respect them. Some of these men with Captain Midnight are the very ones I faced twenty-five years ago!"

"You are slightly—no. *deeply* yellow, Captain Franz."

"I know, sir! I know!"

The Barracuda, nevertheless, picked up his phones and ordered the pilot to take off.

"Follow the shore line," he ordered. "Look for a sheltered place to land—at the other end of the island."

The motors roared and the plane rose.

Darkness was beginning to fall as the Barracuda's plane landed in a very small bay at the southern tip of the island. The craft was quickly moved up a small stream where it would be completely hidden by trees from the prying view of other planes.

CHAPTER TEN

A DISTURBING DISCOVERY

The sudden disappearance of Captain Midnight and his party from the lagoon on the east side of the island had been a consequence of Captain Midnight's alertness and foresight.

Knowing that the Barracuda was bound eventually to learn the approximate position of the Secret Squadron camp from the triangulation of the radio beams of the messages Captain Midnight had sent, the Secret Squadron leader and his friends had moved to the small field beside the lake discovered by Joyce and Chuck.

The lake proved unadapted for the amphibian to use in landing, for Captain Midnight feared sunken logs unseen just beneath the surface. But the field was large enough for landing, so it was chosen by Captain Midnight in which to pitch his new emergency camp.

The plane, parked on the edge of the jungle, was covered with branches and vines so that it was completely hidden from observation. If Mrs. Bosmouth, or anyone else, should fly overhead nothing would be visible to indicate that any flyers occupied the place.

On the day the Barracuda paid his visit to Carla Rotan, the erstwhile Mrs. Bosmouth of Boston, Captain Midnight and Ichabod Mudd were industriously contriving

a "home-made" new Codograph. Ichabod had made considerable progress in evolving the basic rotation of the letters from his memory of the coding of his name M-U-D-D. Yet it was evident to all that the slightest error made in reconstructing the device would cause Captain Midnight's party to remain completely cut off from Secret Squadron headquarters.

While Captain Midnight and Ichabod Mudd continued assiduously at their labors, Joyce and Chuck set out to investigate their surroundings. The trees that flanked the lake near its north end still intrigued Joyce. The hypothesis that a plane had crashed into them long ago she could not put out of her mind.

Naturally the first exploration was in the vicinity of these trees. After a few minutes of searching, Joyce found something of possible significance, half buried in the vegetation that covered the ground—a piece of wood, quite heavy, with a small bit of metal attached to the end.

Joyce showed it to Chuck.

"What do you suppose it is?" she asked. "Part of an airplane?"

But it was somehow different from anything aeronautical Joyce had seen.

"Oh, it's only a piece of curved root," Chuck answered absently.

He did not inspect the wood and besides, he was inclined to doubt Joyce's theory that the trees were broken off by a low-flying plane.

"This is no piece of root!" Joyce said rather hotly.

"See that metal? It was fastened there by human hands!"

"Maybe it's some native weapon," Chuck suggested, still unwilling to surrender to Joyce's theorizing.

"No, Chuck," Joyce said decisively. "I doubt if natives could have made it. And it couldn't be a weapon — isn't handy enough."

Now Chuck took the wood and examined it, in self-defense, quite certain that Joyce simply couldn't be right. Chuck knew what Joyce was driving at. She *wanted* to find a piece of an airplane, to support her contention.

Chuck hefted the wood. He turned it in various positions and finally placed it on the ground.

"Joyce," he said with obvious reluctance, "I hate to admit it, but maybe you're right. It might be some piece of an airplane!"

"But what piece?" Joyce asked.

"Well, I'd say it was the tail skid," Chuck decided. "That means the plane landed here a long time ago, because aircraft don't have tail skids nowadays."

Joyce stared upward at the broken trees and then downward at the piece of wood, which, she perceived, was splintered at one end.

"It crashed," she said bluntly.

"Long ago," Chuck repeated. "The wood is completely rotted."

"Let's look around," Joyce suggested. "Maybe we can find where it crashed."

Scouting along the edge of the jungle they did find

some pieces of old rubber, which Chuck guessed might have been a shock absorber cord on an old model airplane.

"That's pretty good evidence that a plane crashed here several years ago," Chuck concluded. "Maybe tomorrow we can get into the jungle and find where it actually came down." He paused. "I wonder what became of the pilot?"

"Dead, probably," Joyce stated shortly.

By now the hour was growing late, so the exploration had to be cut short that day. Besides, the jungle was dense and forbidding. A machete would be needed for a thorough exploration. One was always carried in the plane, but it had not been brought along by the boy and girl.

"Captain Midnight will be pretty interested," Joyce said as they trudged back to the camp. "You know, Chuck, our discovery might have some bearing on the missing Flying Wing."

"Except that the plane crashed here long before the Flying Wing was built," Chuck said. "Besides, Flying Wings don't have tails—that's why they're called Flying Wings—therefore no tail skids."

Swinging along rapidly at Joyce's side, Chuck tried to figure out what might have happened. Engine failures or poor visibility could have been responsible for the crash. Or the plane might have been caught in one of those violent tropical hurricanes which sweep the Pacific. Still another explanation might be that the

pilot simply had misjudged his speed and was unable to hit the field. After a crash from any such cause the plane might have been scattered over a large area—chances of finding an identifying fragment without a thorough search were small.

Ichabod Mudd and Captain Midnight greeted Joyce and Chuck as they came breathlessly into camp. The two young people related their discovery and showed the splintered tail skid. Captain Midnight was indeed interested.

"I'm afraid it isn't likely to help us much," he said, as Joyce concluded the story. "It certainly wasn't the Flying Wing that crashed here. Still, as you say, it'll do no harm to look around and try to find out what plane it was. It might clear up a mystery to know the lost pilot's identity."

"We'll try tomorrow," Chuck promised.

"Better postpone it," Ichabod Mudd said. "We got a bulletin from headquarters while you were gone this afternoon. The new code is going into effect tomorrow—"

"But that's four days early!" Joyce exclaimed.

"It is," Captain Midnight said. "A safety measure. All of the new Codographs have been issued except those with our names on them. Kelly reasoned that it would be safer for the new code to go into operation early than to give the enemy a chance to translate our messages."

"But what about us?" Chuck asked. "Surely Kelly knows that we haven't one of the new Codographs."

"Kelly knows Ikky is with us and that Ikky devised

the new code," Captain Midnight explained. "He probably reasoned that Ikky wouldn't have any trouble making a duplicate to the new Codograph, wherever we are."

"Maybe I did it and maybe I didn't," Ichabod Mudd declared. "We'll learn when the new code goes into effect at noon tomorrow."

"What'll we do if our Codograph doesn't work?" Joyce asked.

"We'll have to notify Kelly in the emergency code where we are and have him send us a new one," Captain Midnight replied. "Means taking some risks we would rather avoid, but we'll have to do it."

Hardly any attempt was made to conceal the anxiety of the group during the meal that night. As long as Joyce had known Captain Midnight she had never known him to be so silent—was he worried?

If Codographs were sent from headquarters to the island, it not only might reveal to the enemy where Captain Midnight was searching for the Flying Wing, but it might expose the new Codograph to capture by the enemy.

Joyce slept in the cabin of the plane that night, while Chuck, Ichabod and Captain Midnight shared the shelter of a small tent, pitched at the edge of the jungle. The group still maintained its regular guard duty, although all felt safer now hidden in the jungle. Their danger now might come from natives, although most inhabitants of the South Seas are gentle and friendly.

As usual, Joyce had the last trick of guard duty and during her watch she prepared breakfast, which was to consist of fish which Ichabod had caught the afternoon before.

The fish were delicious and palatable. At first the members of the party had been afraid to eat them because Captain Midnight explained that poisonous fish were common in the Pacific islands. In fact, some kinds of fish may be eaten with safety in the vicinity of one island and the same species might be poisonous if caught along the shore of another island. But Ichabod Mudd's hunger had the upper hand of his caution one day, so he roasted some fish and ate them. When no ill effects followed his impulsive repast, he told the others. Since that time fish had been a regular part of the menu.

Other delicacies were furnished by the bounty of nature including plentiful coconuts, tropical fruits and berries. Chuck had discovered numerous yams and there also were breadfruit trees. The preparation of the breadfruit was left to Captain Midnight, however, since he had learned the secret during a visit to Samoa.

After the morning meal was over, Ichabod Mudd brought out the new Codograph for Joyce's inspection. The new device was much like the old one, except that the codes had been changed considerably.

Ikky had added some decorative efforts to the design in the carving of an airplane propeller on the surface of the badge.

"It's pretty," Joyce complimented him.

"The main thing is if it works," Ichabod Mudd said modestly and earnestly. "But in a few hours we'll know. The test will take place at noon. If it don't work, throw me to the sharks."

The morning dragged. When at last it was noon, Captain Midnight switched on the radio receiver in the plane. The tubes warmed up and they heard the carrier wave from the headquarters transmitter.

Faintly they recognized Kelly's voice from headquarters:

"SS-HQ calling SS-1. SS-HQ calling SS-1."

The supreme test of the new Codograph was under way.

Captain Midnight and Chuck had pencils and pads ready to jot down the message. This would afford a double check on what was sent by headquarters.

"SS-HQ calling SS-1," Kelly repeated. "Using the new Codograph. Using the new Codograph. Master code two."

The announcer paused. Then slowly he gave the message, number by number. Tensely Captain Midnight and Chuck wrote down the figures. Joyce and Ichabod watched. The radio began to fade. Joyce stepped up the volume. The static threatened to drown out the announcer's voice. Joyce regulated the squelch.

Would the new Codograph work? Or was Captain Midnight's party cut off from headquarters? At last Kelly's voice announced:

"—HQ signing off," he said.

The message was ended.

"Let's translate it quickly," Joyce breathed, fervently praying that they would be able to decipher the message.

Captain Midnight already had the new Codograph in his hand and was setting it at master code two. There was silence as Chuck read the numbers he had taken down and Captain Midnight called out the letters shown on his dial.

"C-A-N-Y-O-U—"

"That spells 'Can you'!" Joyce exclaimed. "It works! The new Codograph works!"

Ichabod Mudd's sigh of relief sounded like a low breeze through the jungle. Joyce flung her arms around the Irishman's neck and planted a kiss on his cheek. The mechanic's naturally ruddy face suddenly became crimson with confusion.

"Hooray for Ikky!" cried Ichabod Mudd. He stopped, startled to find himself cheering for himself. "I mean just 'Hooray!'" he amended. "Aw, Joyce, what'd you have to smack me for? You got me all mixed up!"

The message was quickly deciphered.

"Here's what it says, folks," Captain Midnight announced. "Listen: 'Can you understand new code? Important information coming. Please reply. SS-HQ.'"

"Boy, oh, boy!" Chuck cried jubilantly. "Isn't this swell? We're not cut off as we were afraid we'd be. We'll reply, all right!"

"Yes, we'll reply," Captain Midnight confirmed, "but

we can't reply from here. We'll have to make another trip out to sea. And before we go, I want to give you and Joyce a new Codograph. Ikky made one for each of us but he wasn't going to mention them if it failed in the test."

"I'll bet he was sure all along that it would work and he just wanted to make me feed him well," Joyce said, as she accepted the Codograph Captain Midnight took from his pocket.

"Yeah," Chuck said. "He just wanted me to carry in all the wood for the fire while he pretended to be working so hard."

"No, honest, folks, I didn't," Ikky protested, grinning.

"We were just kidding, Ikky," Joyce said, laughing. "You're an old dear."

In a few minutes the vines and branches were taken off the plane, the motor was started, and they went aloft.

As the plane soared upward, Joyce looked down at the jungle in a strained effort to see further signs of the plane that had supposedly crashed. But all she could see was the matted green mass of vegetation. Wherever the wreckage lay, if it was there at all, it now was completely hidden by jungle growths.

Captain Midnight flew low, so that his plane would not be seen either by Mrs. Bosmouth and her pilot Carson, or by the crew of the mysterious schooner anchored on the west side of the island.

But when they passed over the cove on the east side of the island Joyce saw a suspicious movement on the beach.

For an instant she believed she glimpsed the figure of a man darting into the jungle.

When Joyce called Chuck's attention to it, the figure was gone.

"I didn't see a thing," Chuck declared.

"I'm sure it was a man," Joyce contended stoutly.

"You're always seeing things, Joyce," Chuck chided. "If it was a man, he was a native. May be some on this island—too frightened to show themselves."

The plane kept low until the island disappeared beneath the horizon. Then Captain Midnight climbed and increased his speed.

Two hundred miles east, the Secret Squadron chief circled while he established contact with headquarters.

"SS-1 calling HQ." Captain Midnight spoke into the microphone. "Message received. Go ahead."

A moment later headquarters answered. This time super-code one was used: Chuck jotted down the numbers while Ichabod Mudd decoded them. Almost as the message ceased, the mechanic had it deciphered.

"Say, this is something, all right!" he announced.

"Go ahead—read it!" Captain Midnight said sharply.

"What it says sure knocked me off my pins," Mudd commented, not to be squelched. "Here it is: '*Ted Roberts found. Flying Wing stolen by enemy agents.*'"

"Great Scott!" Captain Midnight exclaimed. "So Ted Roberts, the pilot of the Flying Wing, has turned up again—alive."

"Yeah, but I'd guess from this news that he wasn't in

the Flying Wing when it dropped outa sight," Ikky said slowly. "He must have been captured by the enemy, but he escaped—or maybe he was turned loose—while *someone else* got away with the Wing."

"Score one for Joyce," Captain Midnight said in praise of the girl. "She suggested several days ago that the enemy knew of the Flying Wing's disappearance because the enemy must have had something to do with it. Call headquarters, Ikky. Ask if Roberts was released or whether he escaped."

Ichabod Mudd had the answer to this query in a jiffy. Kelly notified the Secret Squadron leader that the pilot of the Flying Wing had been released, but Roberts knew that the revolutionary type of plane had landed somewhere in the Pacific and had not yet fallen into enemy hands.

"Ah! That's the information we want!" Captain Midnight smiled. "Roberts undoubtedly was turned loose so that the Barracuda could let us lead him to the Flying Wing. Every move we make is being watched."

"How?" Chuck asked. "The Barracuda isn't around."

"Can't you guess?" Joyce teased. "Your dear friend, Mrs. Bosmouth, certainly has been keeping tab on us, Mr. Ramsay!"

"Right!" Captain Midnight agreed. "Even without direct evidence, we can be pretty sure now that Mrs. Bosmouth is a spy. We should be on our guard against her from now on. But our main task is to find the Flying Wing before the enemy does, and keep the enemy from

getting to it after we find it. The Wing must have come down somewhere near here, but it certainly never tried to signal—perhaps Roberts jammed the radio before he was captured, or maybe the spy smashed it in a forced landing—”

“Probably the spy who stole the Wing is dead,” Mudd suggested.

“You may be right, Ikky,” Captain Midnight agreed. “The crack-up may have killed the pilot, but even a wrecked Flying Wing would be valuable to the enemy. We’ve got to find it first. And *we will!*”

Swinging back toward the island, Captain Midnight prepared for the difficult task that lay ahead. The Secret Squadron group was willing to undertake this task and, if it were humanly possible, they would accomplish it.

But danger lay ahead. For the Barracuda, their arch foe, would expend every resource at his command to bring them to naught—and gain possession of a type of airplane so vital to aerial warfare that it might well turn the tide of battle for the side able to capitalize on it!

CHAPTER ELEVEN

A REQUEST WITH A CATCH

In the dying light of the setting sun the Secret Squadron amphibian flew back toward its base. To land on the small field in darkness would be hazardous. Indeed, it might be safer to come down in one of the small bays that surrounded the island—perhaps even to risk alighting on the bay that Mrs. Bosmouth occupied. Now that all hands were forewarned, there could be little danger. Captain Midnight felt certain that she would not attempt to do injury to them until the objective of her spying was reached.

At present the objective seemed to be the Flying Wing. Yet Captain Midnight was as much in the dark about where the Wing had landed as Mrs. Bosmouth.

"We'll have to talk to her again," he said. "I've some questions to ask her and, as long as our fuel supply is running low, we can save a special trip by paying her our respects tonight."

"Good idea, Captain Midnight!" Joyce jumped at the suggestion. "Let's do it."

As the amphibian crossed over the island Joyce glanced toward the lake. A short distance beyond, deep in the jungle in the center of the island, was a gleam of light.

"Captain Midnight!" Joyce exclaimed. "Look!"



"Captain Midnight!" Joyce Exclaimed. "Look!"

"A fire!" Chuck exclaimed as he spotted the glow. Captain Midnight throttled the motors and began to glide almost noiselessly toward the spot of light.

It was in the most inaccessible part of the island, deep in an overgrown gully between two ridges at the base of a volcanic peak. Roughly, as Ikky estimated it, the fire was about a mile beyond the Secret Squadron camp.

As the plane skimmed the treetops above the fire, not a sign of life could be seen in the reflection of its light. But almost immediately the brightness of the fire diminished.

Chuck understood.

"Someone's putting it out," he said.

The inference was plain: whoever built the fire had heard the plane and did not wish those in the aircraft to see the light.

Captain Midnight gunned the motor and the plane climbed to circle back.

"What do you make of it, Cap'n?" Mudd asked. "Cannibals maybe?"

"Possibly natives, though I don't know," Captain Midnight mused. "The natives on this island—if there are any—might be shy, but there are plenty of other ways to explain that fire."

"Perhaps Mrs. Bosmouth sent her pilot over to spy on us," Chuck suggested.

"Tain't likely," Mudd declared emphatically.

"No," Captain Midnight agreed, "but the fire might have been built by someone from the schooner. We don't

know what purpose that mysterious ship has here. Or the Barracuda may have located our position from our messages and has sent someone to watch us, or attack us."

"Or the fire might have been built by someone we don't even know," Joyce added.

"It don't look so good, Cap'n," Mudd said with a shake of his head. "I hate to think of us bein' in the center of the island with a dunno-what so close by."

"That's another reason we can have for us to spend the night in Mrs. Bosmouth's bay," Captain Midnight agreed. "If she and her pilot are at home we can eliminate her from the fire-building mystery."

"I don't trust her, but she's a heap easier to watch than a native or a dunno-what in the jungle," Mudd asserted with vehemence.

The amphibian was nearing the lagoon, and a few minutes later Captain Midnight set it down beside Mrs. Bosmouth's ship. A light was shining in the cabin of the American woman's plane and as the Secret Squadron craft came alongside—so close that the wings almost touched—Mrs. Bosmouth, dressed in slacks and with her black hair pulled back under a turban, appeared in the doorway. Behind her stood her pilot.

"Oh, good evening, Captain Midnight!" she called hospitably as the Secret Squadron leader cut the motors of his plane. "How nice of you to call!"

"We saw a fire in the jungle," Captain Midnight told her, "and we thought it would be safer for everyone if

we spent the night on your lagoon."

While he spoke, Captain Midnight was watching her closely for an indication that she might have an inkling of the fire-builder's identity. But although the woman's eyes narrowed slightly, she otherwise revealed nothing more than frightened curiosity.

"A fire! Oh, I do hope there are no bloodthirsty savages about!" she said. "Oh, I know—it was built by one of the men from the schooner."

"I haven't met any seamen yet," Captain Midnight said.

"I saw one of the sailors the first day I was here," Mrs. Bosmouth said. "I suspect they're pearl fishermen. They probably leased the rights to gather pearls off this island."

"In that case," Captain Midnight remarked, "I can't understand why they would be camping tonight in an inaccessible part of the jungle."

Far from being annoyed, however, Mrs. Bosmouth seemed very glad to have the added protection of Captain Midnight and his party in her lagoon that night. After sharing a meal with Mrs. Bosmouth and Mr. Carson, her pilot, Captain Midnight and his companions returned to their own craft still not absolutely convinced that this woman was a spy. She was under grave suspicion, but even Joyce had to admit that, if she was a spy, Mrs. Bosmouth was an expert in concealing every hint of it.

Joyce was slow to awaken on the following morning.

The gentle rocking of the plane kept her dozing until long after the sun was up. At first she did not quite realize where she was—then the events of the preceding night came back to her mind. She rubbed her eyes fully awake, smoothed her hair, and slipped into her slacks.

The others seemed to be still asleep too. This lazy, warm climate often made one want to sleep all the time.

Joyce glanced out of the cabin window. Close by, wing to wing with Captain Midnight's plane, was Mrs. Bosmouth's amphibian.

Someone was stirring in the other plane. Then Joyce heard sounds in her own aircraft: a soft whistling in the rear compartment. It was Chuck arising to meet the new day.

About to hail Chuck, Joyce heard the scraping of the emergency hatch above his compartment. Chuck was already crawling out of the plane.

"I'll slip out on the other side of the plane and surprise him!" Joyce said to herself.

She opened the cabin door softly and crept out on the wing. The waters of the lagoon were so clear that Joyce had to repress a temptation to dive in for a little swim. The swim could come later.

Chuck was on top of the plane, very quiet. As Joyce peered at him she saw him watching Mrs. Bosmouth's plane. Chuck was doing a little spying of his own.

Suddenly the cabin door of Mrs. Bosmouth's plane swung open and the woman appeared.

"Good morning, Chuck!" she called.

"Oh, hello Mrs. Bosmouth," Chuck replied, hunched up with his chin on his knees. "A fine morning, isn't it?"

Joyce ducked down out of sight—it wouldn't do for Mrs. Bosmouth to think *two* people were spying on her.

"What are you doing perched up on top of the plane?" Mrs. Bosmouth asked.

"Just watching the queer fish in the lagoon," Chuck said.

He was covering his real purpose admirably, Joyce thought.

"Have you a line? I have one. Come on over and we'll catch some for breakfast."

There was sugary sweetness in Mrs. Bosmouth's invitation. She was up to something, Joyce decided.

"Well—" Chuck hesitated.

"Oh, do come over!" Mrs. Bosmouth urged. "Carson is awake and your friends are still sleeping. We can fish and talk, and disturb no one over here."

The woman *was* up to something! Joyce stayed out of sight to listen. If Chuck should happen to say the wrong thing, Joyce might be able to step in and save the day. Eavesdropping sometimes was necessary!

"I guess I might as well," Chuck said finally.

Chuck negotiated the space between the two planes—a ticklish stunt without falling into the water—and edged across the wing to where Mrs. Bosmouth was putting sections of a fishing rod together. Chuck helped her and then dropped the line overboard.

The young man suddenly emitted a sharp exclamation.

"Gee, Mrs. Bosmouth, there's a bullet hole in the wing of your plane!"

The tense expression on the woman's face was fleeting. Quite composedly she smiled.

"Yes," she admitted, "a souvenir of the day the Barracuda Swarm attacked the Secret Squadron planes escorting me to the mainland."

"And you ran away," Chuck said in an incredulous tone.

"It was wiser," Mrs. Bosmouth replied, emphasizing her words.

"This part of the ocean isn't very safe for a woman," Chuck conceded. "Don't you realize that the Barracuda is likely to find out where Captain Midnight is and attack again?"

"Oh, I'm sure Captain Midnight can take care of the Barracuda," said Mrs. Bosmouth.

"Yes, but Captain Midnight would have no time to protect *you*, Mrs. Bosmouth," Chuck asserted. "The Barracuda might mistake you for a member of the Secret Squadron as long as you are so near us."

"Perhaps *you* could protect me, Chuck."

Joyce, hearing every word of this colloquy, suddenly had an urge to throw a monkey wrench at that woman.

Chuck laughed nervously.

"I'm afraid I couldn't do much, Mrs. Bosmouth," he replied, modestly.

"Very gallantly said, Chuck!"

Anger surged through Joyce as she realized that Mrs.

Bosmouth had some ulterior motive in "playing up" to Chuck Ramsay. Joyce only hoped that Chuck would not yield to her blandishments.

"You ought to fly back to the mainland—or some place protected from the enemy," Chuck went on.

Mrs. Bosmouth shook her head.

"Sorry, Chuck," she said, "but I can't do that. I've started something and I'll have to finish it."

"You're taking a very foolish stand, Mrs. Bosmouth," Chuck told her.

"You may call me Carla, Chuck," the woman said. "My full name is so much to say."

"Anyhow you ought to leave this island, Mrs.—er—Carla," Chuck repeated. "There are so many mysterious happenings here, all of them spelling serious dangers to you. That fire we saw, for instance, may be something much more serious than any of us suspect. That schooner may not be what it seems. The Barracuda might return. Or enemy warships might suddenly decide to stop here. This is no place for a woman!"

Mrs. Bosmouth resolutely shook her head.

"I've made my decision, Chuck."

"You won't go back to the United States?"

"No, I will not," Mrs. Bosmouth said emphatically. "I'm sticking it out here."

At that moment Chuck caught a fish and pulled it out of the water. He dropped it in a creel which he lowered into the lagoon to keep the fish alive and fresh.

Joyce was smiling. Chuck had learned one sure

thing about Mrs. Bossmouth's intentions. The woman apparently was going to remain on this island no matter what happened.

"But there is something you can do for me, Chuck," Mrs. Bossmouth resumed after a short silence.

"Yes?"

"I should ask Captain Midnight, probably, but he's so terribly busy that I'd rather not bother him."

"Is it that important, Mrs.—ah—Carla?"

"Yes, very important. Perhaps you can speak to Captain Midnight about it for me."

"Perhaps I can. What is it?"

"You see, Chuck, it's like this," Mrs. Bossmouth began hesitantly. "I've been away from my poor, dear mother for some time. I'm anxious to send her a message. I want her to know that I'm safe and will return soon. Unfortunately, my radio's out of commission. I thought perhaps Captain Midnight could send the message for me."

"Maybe Ichabod Mudd could fix your radio," Chuck suggested.

"Oh, no! It's not necessary to put him to so much trouble," Mrs. Bossmouth said quickly. "Besides, I've only a small transmitter and it probably wouldn't be powerful enough even after it was repaired."

"Well," Chuck said, "I know Captain Midnight would want to help. I don't see why he couldn't send a message for you. I'll ask him this morning."

"Oh, thank you, Chuck. Now there's one other thing

about the message. I wouldn't like to have outsiders listen in, because there will be something confidential in it—”

“You mean you want it to be sent in code?” Chuck asked in a troubled tone.

“Yes,” Mrs. Bosmouth replied with a nod, “that's what I want. Undoubtedly the Secret Squadron has some way of sending code messages. You wouldn't have to tell me the code—just send the message and give me the answer after it arrives.”

“Well, if it won't be necessary for us to tell you the code I think it might be all right,” Chuck said slowly. “I'll ask Captain Midnight.”

“I'm sure he'll agree,” Mrs. Bosmouth asserted.

She took a folded paper from her pocket and handed it to Chuck.

“Here is the message,” she said. “I've already written it.”

Joyce was trembling with excitement as she slipped back into the cabin. She went to the cockpit, where Captain Midnight had spent the night. As she rapped, Captain Midnight answered.

“Is that you, Joyce?”

“Yes. Are you awake?”

The door opened and Captain Midnight let the girl in.

“That woman—Mrs. Bosmouth—” Joyce began.

“Oh! So you've been eavesdropping, too?” Captain Midnight accused with a smile.

“Have *you*?” Joyce asked unbelievingly.

Captain Midnight nodded.

"Yes," he said. "I couldn't help overhearing, and I'm sure the whole business is a clever plot to steal our new Secret Squadron code."

"But how?" Joyce asked.

"It would be simple," Captain Midnight explained. "All Mrs. Bosmouth would have to do is listen to our transmission of the message and compare it with a copy—which she undoubtedly has. That would give her a key to our code."

"Of course you wouldn't *send* the message," Joyce said.

Captain Midnight chuckled.

"You're wrong, Joyce," he replied. "I am going to send her message. We don't want her to think for a moment that we suspect her of being a spy."

"Captain Midnight! You can't let her in on the new code!"

"I won't!" Captain Midnight promised. "I'll send her message in the *old code*. Her reaction may give us some positive basis for what we already suspect—that she is an enemy agent."

Joyce's clouded face quickly changed to a smiling one as she realized that Captain Midnight's plan would upset Mrs. Bosmouth's scheme.

"I only wish Chuck was more like you, Captain Midnight," Joyce burst out. "Sometimes I think he believes Mrs. Bosmouth isn't a spy."

"Chuck has plenty of good sense, Joyce," Captain Mid-

night said. "He's a smart young man—smarter than you give him credit for. You're just a little piqued because he's been paying some attention to Mrs. Bosmouth. I think Chuck has been doing it because he thinks she needs watching and he hopes he can learn something."

"I guess you're right," Joyce admitted, relenting. "But sometimes Chuck wears his thoughts on his sleeve and a woman like Mrs. Bosmouth can be quite a hazard if she is smart enough to read Chuck's thoughts."

Chuck and Mrs. Bosmouth had caught a nice mess of fish; she was taking them into her cabin to be cleaned and served for breakfast for all. Mudd also was aroused by this time and, when Chuck's fish were ready for serving, the group from Captain Midnight's plane crossed to Mrs. Bosmouth's plane to eat.

It was at breakfast that Chuck requested Captain Midnight to dispatch Mrs. Bosmouth's message in code. Chuck explained that Mrs. Bosmouth's radio was out of order.

"Certainly, I'll send the message," Captain Midnight agreed. "Give it to me. I'll code it and send it the next time I communicate with our headquarters."

"Do you intend to remain on this island?" Mrs. Bosmouth then asked.

"I hope you won't be offended if I don't tell you our plans," Captain Midnight replied graciously.

"Of course not!" Mrs. Bosmouth said, but her manner belied her words. "I am already deeply indebted to you. I will ask no more questions. But you do not suspect me



"Do You Intend to Remain on the Island?"

of anything unfriendly, I hope?"

"My refusal is not personal," Captain Midnight endeavored to reassure her. "My orders forbid me to tell anyone my plans, at any time. To be frank, I do not know how long I will be on this island, but, even if I knew, I would not be at liberty to tell."

Soon after breakfast the Secret Squadron group returned to their plane. In a few minutes they took off and flew directly to their hidden landing field in the center of the island. The camp was just as they had left it. The fire-builders apparently had paid no visit, or, if they had, had disturbed nothing.

"We've got a full day ahead of us," Captain Midnight told his assistants. "I think we'd better get busy and try to turn up some clue to the Flying Wing. If Mrs. Bosmouth is a spy, she'll probably have the Barracuda after us before long and we'll have to get our job done quickly."

"Joyce and I can work north from this camp, while you and Ikky go south," Chuck suggested.

"Good. Ikky and I will keep our eyes open for the fire-builder, and you and Joyce can look for the wrecked plane," Captain Midnight instructed them. "I think we'd better search on foot. The Wing might have crashed in the jungle so that it couldn't be seen very well from the air."

Shortly after that, the two parties set out. Chuck brought a machete along this time so that he and Joyce could cut their way into the jungle. A few strokes of

the machete brought Chuck and Joyce to more old traces of the wrecked plane. A patch of rotted fabric and a piece of wing spar were tangled with vines. All doubts that a plane had crashed here long ago were removed and Joyce began to feel that the principal wreckage must be close by.

A few more strokes of the machete brought Joyce and Chuck to a sort of a jungle path, possibly one made by natives. Chuck led the way along the path.

Suddenly he stopped abruptly and beckoned to Joyce behind him. Joyce looked over Chuck's shoulder.

There, nestled in the heart of the jungle, was the unmistakable wreckage of an airplane—long lost to the civilized world.

CHAPTER TWELVE

THE PUZZLE OF THE CASTAWAY

The original fuselage of the wrecked plane was clearly discernible. The wings were gone and the cabin was battered and torn, but it was intact.

"An old Fokker!" Chuck exclaimed, recognizing it as one of the first cabin models made.

It was a single-motored ship, but the rusted machinery had lost all semblance of a motor. A flower was blooming on a vine twined about the long-idle propeller.

Chuck and Joyce crept forward cautiously—for the wreck somehow looked inhabited. Palm leaves had been stuffed in to patch holes in the cockpit, and a rustic ladder led from the ground to the cabin door.

"Someone's made a home here," Joyce whispered.

Chuck nodded.

"Wonder if he's in now?" he said.

Reaching the ladder, Chuck climbed slowly up it. No sound came from the dark interior of the cabin. After listening a moment, the youth stepped inside. A moment later Joyce joined him.

The cabin seats had been torn out. A rude table had been built across the front. In the rear was a low pallet of grass to serve as a bed. Some half-eaten fruit on a shelf indicated recent occupancy, and water stood in a coconut

shell on the table.

"The pilot must still be alive!" Joyce guessed in wild surmise.

"Maybe a native is living here," Chuck suggested.

Joyce, however, was looking at conclusive evidence that this was the habitation of a man who had once lived in civilized surroundings. On the wall was a sheet of paper. Hanging from a nail near by was a string to which was fastened the stub of a pencil. The paper was covered with little marks.

"See!" Joyce pointed to the paper on the wall. "That's a makeshift calendar! No native would make such a record of time!"

"But if the pilot is still alive, why hasn't he made himself known?" Chuck pondered. "Surely he has heard our plane—it's less than a mile from here. Doesn't he want to be rescued?"

The question stumped Joyce, too. Robinson Crusoe had lived on his island watching day after day for a ship. Here was a modern castaway who hid from possible rescuers. Perhaps the pilot had lost his mind—possibly he was hiding near by watching them!

Chuck, going to the door of the plane, shaped a megaphone with his hands.

"Halloa! Halloa!" he shouted.

The jungle echoed the loud call. Birds shrilled from the treetops, but no human voice answered.

Chuck called again.

Still no answer came.

He turned to Joyce.

"What had we better do?"

"Probably he doesn't want to see us. Maybe he doesn't trust us," she replied, her eye darting everywhere to seek some sign of the lost pilot.

In her pockets Joyce found a small notebook which she used to transcribe messages. On a sheet of paper torn from this book she scribbled a message, using the pencil hanging from the nail.

"We won't harm you. We are Americans. We'll help you if you will come to us. Our camp is by the lake."

Joyce put the message under the coconut shell used as a water container.

"There," she said. "That ought to bring him, unless he's been here so long he's forgotten how to read."

"Are we going back?"

"That's about the only thing we can do, Chuck. The pilot apparently is afraid of us, or he'd have approached us long ago. If we go away, he may return, read the note and decide to get in touch with us."

Leaving the wrecked plane as they had found it, Chuck and Joyce started back along the jungle path toward their camp. It took less time than they thought, since they did not have to cut their way back through dense growths on the return trip.

Joyce, leading the way, halted suddenly as they neared the edge of the jungle.

"Captain Midnight must have returned," she said. "Listen! Someone's starting the plane."



"Listen! Someone Is Starting the Plane."

In the distance a high-powered engine coughed. The sound was unmistakable—the inertia starter was being used.

"Blazin' beacons, Joyce!" Chuck shouted. "That's not Captain Midnight! Whoever it is doesn't understand the motor! It's the castaway pilot!"

Joyce broke into a run. A few steps brought her out of the jungle. As she emerged she saw the plane at the south side of the landing field, its propellers jerking spasmodically while someone was trying to start the motor. Whoever was working the starter was not quite familiar with its mechanism, but as Joyce ran across the field toward the plane the motors suddenly caught and the twin propellers roared.

The castaway pilot was trying to steal the plane!

Joyce was running frantically toward the plane. Chuck was right at her heels, shouting and waving his hands.

The motors spluttered and almost died, then they caught again. Whoever was at the controls was having difficulties.

Chuck stumbled, toppled head first. When he scrambled to his feet, he was far behind Joyce.

"Quick, Joyce!" he cried. "Stop him!"

The cabin door was only a few yards away. Joyce *had* to reach it.

Slowly the plane began to move.

Joyce knew that the plane would never get off the ground unless the engines were warmed, but whoever was at the controls apparently didn't know much about

modern airplanes.

A wing swept past Joyce as she spurted toward the cabin door. She wasn't going to make it. At the controls she caught a glimpse of a figure in the cockpit. He was a white man, although hardly recognizable as such. His head was covered with long, tangled hair and his face was concealed by a thick beard. His clothing was mostly rags and he looked as brown as a savage.

Joyce saw a flash and heard a crack. A sound buzzed past her ear.

"Look out, Joyce!" Chuck shouted from behind her.
"He's got a gun!"

Joyce tried to grab the cabin door as it went past, but she missed it by inches. The plane was going to get away. In desperation Joyce flung herself on the tail and tried to hold the plane.

She felt herself dragged off the ground. Stubbornly Joyce held on, before she realized that she could not stop the plane.

Unless Joyce did something to prevent it she would be carried up into the air with a mad pilot at the controls. She thought of the elevator horn. It was right by her hand.

Swinging herself astraddle the tail, she seized the mechanism. It was coming up as the castaway pilot pulled the wheel control in the cockpit back. Joyce braced herself and pulled with all her might. The elevator gave slightly and the tail moved down.

But the escaping pilot had more strength than Joyce.

For her it would be a losing battle.

Out of the corner of her eye, Joyce saw the plane sweeping toward the jungle. The ship wasn't going to take off in time! It would crash in the green foliage on the edge of the clearing.

Releasing her hold Joyce dropped off the stabilizer to the ground. She rolled over and over on the soft grass. Then came a splintering crash.

Joyce, suddenly releasing her hold on the elevator horn, had caused the pilot to lose control. The plane had nosed over on the ground.

Joyce was on her feet looking with dismay at the amphibian.

"Oh, oh! It's wrecked!" she wailed, with visions of becoming a castaway on this island.

Chuck came running to her side.

"Joyce! Are you all right?" he cried.

"Of course I'm all right!" Joyce said, still looking at the wrecked amphibian. "But look at our plane!"

From the jungle Captain Midnight and Ikky appeared, breathless and alarmed. Having heard the sound of the motor, they had hurried back, arriving just too late to witness Joyce's effort to stop the theft of their plane.

After one glance to assure himself that Chuck and Joyce were safe, Captain Midnight hurried toward the wrecked plane.

"Be careful!" Chuck warned. "He's got a gun!"

Mudd broke a dead branch from one of the jungle trees to use as an emergency weapon and followed Cap-

Captain Midnight, who had drawn his automatic pistol.

The Secret Squadron leader reached the plane in a few strides and swung open the cabin door.

"Okay!" he called to Mudd. "He's knocked out."

Captain Midnight's head and shoulders disappeared inside the plane. A second later he reappeared, holding a limp, emaciated figure in his arms.

Mudd arrived in time to assist Captain Midnight in lifting out the unconscious castaway and placing him on the ground.

Joyce and Chuck ran up to stare at the frail, unkempt body on the ground. His arms and legs were tanned deeply from the tropic sun and he wore clothing made of silk! The man must have fashioned garments from remnants of his parachute.

"A white man," Captain Midnight said, bathing the man's face with water poured from his canteen.

"He's the pilot of that wrecked plane," Joyce explained. "We found it not far from here in the jungle. It looked as if he'd been living in it for years."

The castaway was showing signs of reviving, so Mudd turned his attention to an inspection of the damaged plane. He shook his head sadly as he noted that one wing-tip was smashed.

The bent propeller could be fixed with a spare, but fixing a wing-tip was not nearly so simple.

"Maybe I can patch it," he said, "and maybe I can't. About the only thing I can do is try, I guess."

Chuck, going through the pockets of the injured cast-

away, found a knife, a few trinkets apparently given him by natives, and a worn leather card case containing a pilot's license dated 1927. This bore the name of William S. Madison.

"Bill Madison!" Captain Midnight exclaimed.

"Yes," Chuck said, rereading the name. "Did you know him, Captain Midnight?"

"Never met him, but I've heard of him. He was an old timer—a daredevil youngster. Learned to fly right after the First World War, and won a reputation for being willing to try anything. Went in for stunt flights—breaking records, flying under bridges, racing."

"How on earth did he get *here*?" Joyce asked.

Madison was stirring now. Captain Midnight eased him back on the grass and waited for him to open his eyes.

"As I recall the story," Captain Midnight related, "Madison heard some sailor's tale about a South Sea island treasure. There was a map, I believe—the newspapers carried columns about it at the time. Anyway, Madison interested a wealthy man and his wife—a Mr. Sampson—in the story. They financed a plane and he took off from Lower California for the South Seas. They went with him and were never heard of again. It was about the time of the first trans-ocean flights when so many other planes took off on long-distance hops and failed to return."

"Do you suppose Mr. and Mrs. Sampson are alive, Cap'n?" Mudd asked.

"I don't think so," Joyce said. "There were signs of only one person living in the wrecked plane."

"I don't see how Madison came through it," Chuck said. "His plane certainly was cracked up! Both wings sheared off."

"Sometimes it's amazing what a human being can live through," Captain Midnight observed.

"Yes," Joyce agreed. "I wasn't even scratched when I tumbled off the tail of the plane, just now."

"You *should* have been—taking such a risk," Chuck reprimanded. "But just the same, I'm glad you weren't hurt."

Madison's eyes fluttered. He opened them and closed them several times and then at last he seemed to realize that he was in the presence of others. A haunting fear crept into his eyes.

Badly frightened, Madison moved as though he were about to scramble away.

"Take it easy, old man!" Captain Midnight said. "We won't hurt you!"

The sound of Captain Midnight's voice seemed to arouse greater fear in the castaway. He tried desperately to get up, but Captain Midnight seized him by the shoulders and held him. For a moment Madison struggled like a caught animal, while Captain Midnight repeated words of assurance.

"We didn't come here to hurt you," the Secret Squadron leader said. "We're here to help you!"

Gradually Madison's struggles weakened until at last

the castaway lay panting, staring defiantly at his captors. When at last he seemed assured that he was in no immediate danger of harm, his lips began to move as if he were trying to form forgotten words.

"Don't be afraid of us," Captain Midnight told him. "We're friends—airplane pilots like you. We're Americans!"

"Americans!"

The castaway's lips formed the word and he seemed to smile a little.

"We know who you are," Joyce said. "You're Bill Madison."

The castaway nodded his head and murmured faintly, speaking with difficulty:

"Bill—Madison."

"We found your name on your pilot's license," Chuck explained.

"You—you—who—"

Madison was unsure of his words.

"You want to know who we are?" Captain Midnight asked.

"Yes—yes—"

"We're Americans here on an important mission. We're not going to hurt you," Captain Midnight said.

"You—come—with—Captain Burly?"

Once more Madison was like a wild animal seeking to escape captivity. His eyes grew wild.

"I wonder who Captain Burly is," Chuck said.

"This is Cap'n Midnight, not Cap'n Burly," Mudd ex-

plained.

"Midnight—Captain Midnight. Who—"

"Don't be alarmed by the name, Madison," Captain Midnight spoke soothingly. "That's only a name by which I'm known. Who's Captain Burly?"

"Bad!" Madison spoke emphatically. "Must—keep 'way!"

"Is he on this island?" Joyce asked.

"Yes—yes. On island. Come in boat. Will come back. Kill—kill—"

"Do you mean the schooner?" Joyce asked, recalling the mysterious vessel anchored on the west side of the island.

Madison nodded vigorously.

"Why should Captain Burly want to kill? Whom does he want to kill?" Captain Midnight asked.

"Want—to—kill—*me!*" Madison said. "I—I don't tell him. So he say he—he kill me!"

The voice was deathly afraid.

"What does he want you to tell him?" Captain Midnight asked patiently.

Madison tried to get up. Once more it was necessary to quiet him. At Joyce's suggestion, Captain Midnight and Chuck carried the man to the tent at the edge of the jungle. Madison would be out of the hot sun in the tent.

"We're not going to hurt you," Captain Midnight told the castaway again. "The only reason I asked what Burly wants to know was to help protect you. How

many men does Burly have with him?"

Madison studied and counted on his fingers.

"Maybe four—five. Bad men."

"Why did you try to take our plane?" Joyce asked.

"Fly 'way. Go back to—to America."

Madison was speaking a little easier now. Words forgotten by disuse were beginning to come back to him. He was able to talk again, slowly at first but with each moment he spoke more easily.

"Are there any other people on this island?" Captain Midnight asked.

"Some natives," Madison said. "Afraid of—of white men."

"They've been hiding from us?" Captain Midnight asked.

"Yes. They hide by day. Come out at night."

"I suppose you did the same," Captain Midnight said. "You probably put out the fire last night that we saw from our plane."

Madison nodded his head.

"Many years ago a plane landed here," Madison said. "I came out. The men shot at me. I was—afraid."

Madison's wild appearance must have frightened them, Joyce decided.

"That's why you took no chance with us?" Captain Midnight asked.

"Yes," Madison replied. "I see planes lately. I am afraid of all."

"Other planes?" Captain Midnight glanced quickly

at Chuck and Joyce. "What kind of planes?"

"Not many days ago I see something like a plane, yet not like a plane," Madison said with a troubled look in his eyes. "I saw a *thing* fly through the air. Natives run and hide."

"What was it?" Captain Midnight asked the question without concealing his eagerness. Could it be what he was hunting?

"*Thing* like a big bird—great big wing, but not a plane. It had no body—no tail!" Madison almost grew hysterical. "Such a *thing* can't fly. You may think I lie, but I do not lie. You think I lose my mind—yes—yes—I am losing my mind. I go crazy. *I am crazy!*"

"The Flying Wing!" Joyce exclaimed.

CHAPTER THIRTEEN

A SINISTER VISITOR

Years of loneliness, tropical heat, and a fear not yet completely explained may have unbalanced Bill Madison's mind, but there was no mistaking of his description of the Flying Wing. The pilot's jerky, disconnected sentences left no room for doubt—a great big wing . . . no body . . . no tail . . .

"You're sane," Captain Midnight declared. "Madison, you've helped us no end! We know what you're talking about! We've been hunting for the Flying Wing!"

"A wing that flies?" Madison asked. "How can it?"

"Remember, Madison, your knowledge of aeronautics is fifteen years behind all the developments and advances," Captain Midnight explained. "The Flying Wing is a late invention. Right now it's the most valuable aviation secret in the world. That's why we're here—to see that this secret is kept. How long ago did you see the Wing?"

"Two—maybe three weeks ago. But why is it—a secret?" Madison still fumbled over his words.

"Never mind. We'll explain that later," Captain Midnight told him. "In what direction was it going?"

Madison closed his eyes, trying to recall what he had seen. He opened his eyes and nodded.

"It came from over there—" he pointed to the north-east. "From low clouds. It circled over the island. I heard a sound like an engine missing. It cannot land here—field too small. After it circled it flew southwest—low over the ocean."

"That's something to work on!" Captain Midnight said.

Joyce realized that this was the first definite news of the Flying Wing they had learned on their trip. The Wing apparently flew over this island trying to find a place to land. The only field not covered with jungle was too small and it had gone on. One of its engines was failing and the craft was losing altitude. It could not have flown on very far.

"Are there islands southwest of here?" Captain Midnight asked.

"One, about ten—twelve miles," Madison said. "No better than this for a landing field. I tried to find one there—once, before I crashed here."

"The Wing might not have been able to make it back," Joyce suggested. "Maybe it's there! We'll have to repair our plane and—"

Joyce paused as she realized that the Secret Squadron plane might be beyond repair. The only other plane on the island was Mrs. Bosmouth's—and she might be a spy!

Silence fell over the group, a silence broken in a strange fashion.

"Ahoy! Ahoy! Anybody home?"

The hail came from across the clearing.

Joyce turned. From the edge of the jungle near the wrecked plane four men strode into view. All carried rifles. The leader, a short, stocky man with a black beard and a battered seaman's cap, raised his hand to his mouth and called again.

"Avast, you lubbers! Answer me! Are you tongue-tied?"

Madison moaned at the sound of the voice.

"He come! Captain Burly!"

Ichabod Mudd came out of the tent and started toward the wrecked plane.

"Stay here with Madison, Joyce," Captain Midnight ordered. "You come with me, Chuck."

Madison was trembling and Joyce tried to comfort him.

"You have nothing to fear, Mr. Madison," she said. "Captain Midnight won't let any harm come to you."

Madison was quieter. He tried to smile at the girl.

"I—I'm not afraid!" he said.

Slowly he closed his eyes. He was completely exhausted. His frail body was demanding rest.

Joyce pulled back the flap of the tent. She saw Mudd standing near the wrecked plane, defiantly awaiting the approach of the four strangers. Captain Midnight and Chuck were skirting along the edge of the jungle behind the plane.

One of the men raised his gun toward Mudd, but a sharp command from the leader caused him to lower it.

Joyce saw Captain Midnight, his automatic pistol ready for action, beckoning for Mudd to get back out of sight. Chuck also had a gun ready.

Mudd at last obeyed.

As he reached his two companions he turned to Chuck.

"Gimme your gun!" he said. "I'll teach them guys—"

"Take it easy, Ikky!" Captain Midnight ordered.
"Give him your pistol, Chuck."

"But, Captain—"

"Never mind, Chuck. Give him your gun. You stay here."

Reluctantly Chuck surrendered his pistol to Ikky.

"Okay, Cap'n. Come on, let's give 'em the works!"

"Take it easy, I said," Captain Midnight ordered sharply. "No shooting unless they ask for it."

"But there's only four of 'em, Cap'n—"

"And we have no quarrel with them, so there's no use starting one—"

"They think they've got a quarrel with *us*," Ichabod Mudd asserted.

Captain Midnight stepped into view and shouted:

"Hold it! Don't come any closer to that plane!"

The men hesitated, apparently awaiting orders from their leader. The stocky man took a deliberate step toward the plane. Captain Midnight's pistol blazed and dirt spurted up at the man's feet.

The stocky man's face contorted with anger, but he dropped back a pace and waved his hand to the men

who were raising their rifles.

"Hold it, men!" he said. "Hey, you! What's the idea?"

The last remark was addressed to Captain Midnight.

"I said stay away from that plane!" A sharp note in Captain Midnight's voice carried weight.

Captain Midnight coolly stuck his pistol in his hip pocket and began walking toward the leader. The Secret Squadron leader's actions were easy, but Joyce noticed that his right hand moved close to the butt of the pistol with every swing. Captain Midnight was ready to shoot at the first sign of hostility on the part of the strangers. Ichabod, now hidden in the jungle, had his pistol ready, too.

"That's far enough," the gorilla-chested leader called to Captain Midnight. "What d'ya wanna do? Get drilled?"

"I want to find out who you are and what you want?"

"Fair 'nough," the leader returned gruffly. "We want to find out who you are. You act balmy, but that ain't my business. We can fill ya full o' holes if you get smart."

"If you think you can, why don't you start shooting?" came Captain Midnight's voice in level tones of cool challenge.

The stocky man snarled, but he made no move.

"Ya got more nerve than wits," he shouted. "I do what I pleases an' them that don't like it keep outa my way."

"We're willing," Captain Midnight said, "if you put



“What D’ya Wanna Do? Get Drilled?”

it on a mutual basis. We'll keep out of your way, if you keep out of ours."

"You're in my way right now," said the black-bearded man.

"And you're in ours. We were here first."

"We were here before you ever heard tell o' this place," the stocky man argued. "This island ain't big enough for both of us. Get what I mean?"

"We'll stay here until we're ready to go," Captain Midnight replied.

"What'd ya come here for?" There was a note of suspicion in the man's voice.

"I can't go into details about that," Captain Midnight declared. "But I don't believe it has anything to do with you."

"I dunno 'bout that!" the heavyweight spoke gruffly. "Ya found Bill Madison's plane, hey? An' ya musta found Madison 'cause we can't find him anywhere. Ya ain't gonna get away—"

"Certainly we found Madison," Captain Midnight admitted. "And when we leave we're taking Madison with us. He doesn't belong here and he wants to go back with us."

"Ya ain't foolin' me with that talk," the man grumbled. "I know what ya want from Bill Madison but ya ain't gonna get away with it. I was here first an' I ain't gonna let nobody cheat me outa what I got comin'."

"No one's going to cheat anybody, and that includes Bill Madison," Captain Midnight said with emphasis.

The stocky man jerked his head around, scanning the edge of the jungle.

"Where's Madison?" he demanded.

"We're taking care of him," Captain Midnight replied quietly. "He's hurt."

"What're ya handin' me?" came the reply. "He was all right a few hours ago!"

"He got hurt trying to fly our plane," Captain Midnight explained.

A look of cunning crossed the seaman's face.

"Tryin to fly your plane, eh? How'd ya come to let him do it?"

"He tried to take it while we were away," Captain Midnight replied.

The black-bearded man roared with laughter.

"So that's how the wind blows, huh? He tries to fly away, figgerin' on leavin' ya here—jest swappin' his old wreck for yours. Doesn't look like he thinks much of ya. Guess he figgered ya was tryin' to double-cross him. An' ya give me that song an' dance 'bout bein' a pal o' his!"

"I said nothing about being a particular pal of his," Captain Midnight said. "But Bill Madison certainly needs a pal."

"Yeah!" the stranger said, laughing again. "He needs a friend, all right. Funny how everybody wants to be his friend, ain't it? I tell ya—bring Madison out so's I can talk to him an' we'll see who's his best friend."

"That might be a good idea—Captain Burly."

The stranger scowled.

"So ya learned my name from Madison, hey?" he asked. "Well, I ain't ashamed of it. I'm Cap'n Pete Burly of the schooner 'Flossie'—as barnacled an' waterlogged a scow as ever snagged a pearl."

"I'll ask Madison if he wants to talk to you."

"Hi—wait a minute! What's *your* name?"

But Captain Midnight was striding back into the jungle.

"Oh, all right, ya needn't tell me," Captain Burly called after the Secret Squadron leader. "I'll know ya when I see ya again. But don't keep me awaitin', or I'm likely to come alookin' for ya."

Ichabod Mudd lowered the pistol he was aiming through the trees at Captain Burly. The Irishman grinned at Captain Midnight.

"Nice people, ain't he, Cap'n?"

"My guess is that Captain Burly and his men are the choicest ring of rascals you could find in the South Seas, excepting maybe the Barracuda's Swarm," Captain Midnight said. "Talking to Madison is the only way to get rid of him."

"Sometimes you can get rid of unwanteds pretty easy," Mudd declared. "I remember how I got rid of a big patrol of Jerrys during the last war in Europe without hardly any trouble—or at least one of my pals got rid of 'em—"

"How was that, Ikky?" Chuck asked.

"Well, one of our pilots crashed near Sedan. I was sent with a couple of other mechanics to see if the plane

could be salvaged. But we got lost and wandered into a town held by the Germans. It was sure a tight spot—”

“How’d you get out?” Chuck asked impatiently.

“Well, the German retreat was on and they were evacuating the town,” Mudd went on. “We figured if we holed up they’d leave and we could just wait until the American-French advance caught up with us. But while we were lookin’ for a hiding place we ran right into a detachment of Jerrys—Boches or Fritz we called ‘em then—about fifteen or twenty of ‘em against three of us. We dodged into a big building which turned out to be a hospital that the Germans had just evacuated. It was empty and so we stayed.”

“That was lucky,” Chuck said.

“It would have been if the Jerrys hadn’t seen us go in the place,” Ikky went on. “A squad of soldiers came into the building right at our heels, so we scrambled into one of the rooms, jumped into beds and took off our helmets. We pulled the covers up to our chins to conceal our American uniforms. They came right in the room and were goin’ to make us explain who we were, when our corporal shouted. His name was Schneider and he was from Milwaukee, so he spoke a pretty good brand of Deutsch. As the Jerrys came toward us he hollered something in German and the whole squad turned about and ran out the door.”

“Say, what did he shout?” Chuck asked.

“I didn’t learn until after the Armistice,” Mudd replied. “Then when we were at Cologne I asked him. He

said all he hollered was: ‘Hey, beat it, you guys; this is the contagious ward.’”

Joyce, who had watched Captain Midnight’s parley with Captain Burly from a screen of brush just in front of the tent, now turned back toward the tent to see if Madison was feeling better.

As she pushed back the tent flap a startled cry came from her lips.

Madison was gone!

“Joyce!” It was Chuck’s voice. “Joyce!”

Chuck, followed by Captain Midnight, was approaching on the run.

“Here, Chuck!” Joyce called.

Chuck and Captain Midnight appeared outside the tent.

“Gee, Joyce!” Chuck exclaimed, “I’m glad you’re safe. I heard you cry out—what was it?”

“Madison’s taken French leave!” Joyce exclaimed. “I was outside the tent to see what was happening. I thought he was trying to sleep, but he slipped out the back of the tent—”

Crack!

A pistol shot sounded from the clearing.

“Captain Midnight! Captain Midnight!” Ichabod Mudd was calling.

Captain Midnight ducked through the trees to the edge of the jungle.

“What’s up, Ikky?”

“They’re movin’ toward the plane!”

Captain Midnight, holding the pistol in his hand, stepped out of the jungle.

"Get away from that plane!" Captain Midnight's commanding voice was as effective as a pistol shot.

The schooner's men halted in their tracks, turned and faced the Secret Squadron leader.

"What's the idea, shootin' at us?" Captain Burly demanded, spitting into the grass at his feet.

"No one shot at you," Captain Midnight replied. "One of my men fired as a signal that you were moving toward our plane. I warned you to keep away from it."

"Okay." Burly suddenly seemed satisfied that Captain Midnight was within his rights. "We just wanted to look at it. Where's Madison?"

Captain Midnight took a deep breath. Joyce could see the Secret Squadron leader's fingers grip his automatic pistol more tightly.

"He's disappeared," Captain Midnight confessed.

"Oh, yeah? Ya ain't foolin' me!" Burly said angrily. "I thought ya was givin' me a line before. Now I'm sure of it. You didn't fool me then, an' you ain't foolin' me now."

"Would you like to see for yourself?" Captain Midnight asked.

Captain Burly advanced a pace toward Captain Midnight and then stopped. He seemed to change his mind.

"You're a pretty smart guy, ain't ya?" he asked with a sneer. "Ya wanna get me outa sight o' my men an' then stick a knife in my back."

"I don't fight that way, Burly," Captain Midnight said. "And I resent any implication that I do. But I can see what kind of men you usually deal with—"

"Never mind no highfalutin' lip," Burly growled angrily. "I've been doin' all right by myself—but not by playin' the other fellow's games. I'll take your word for it Madison's gone this time, but if I find out you lied, I'll come back an' mop you and your bunch up an' smear ya all over this island. An' lemme tell you somepin' else, wise guy. If ya know what's good for ya, ya'll get that airplane off its nose, crank 'er up an' git outa here."

Captain Midnight's face grew red.

"*You'll* get out of here now!"

"All right, all right!" Burly said. "Ya got th' drop on me with your men in th' trees drawin' a bead, but there'll come a time when things will be on my side of th' mast. Then watch out!"

Captain Burly whirled on his heel and beckoned to his men. With the three disreputable sailors tagging along behind him, he strode angrily away into the jungle.

"Whew!" Chuck said, wiping his brow. "I'm glad that's over!"

Ikky grinned.

"They weren't so tough," he insisted.

"They certainly acted tough," Chuck declared.

Captain Midnight rejoined his companions and Joyce moved out of concealment.

"Do you think the plane can be fixed, Ikky?" she

asked.

"Mighty big job," the mechanic said. "Maybe I can fix it. Maybe not."

Joyce didn't like the way Ikky spoke. Usually the mechanic was pretty confident about repairing anything. This time he wasn't. What if the Secret Squadron amphibian couldn't be made to fly again?

"You must not fail to get the amphibian aloft—*quickly*," Captain Midnight declared. "Patch her up the best you can. We've a great deal at stake now. We've got a clue on the Flying Wing!"

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

MISCHIEF AFOOT

During the latter part of the afternoon, Ichabod Mudd tackled the task of repairing the damage to the plane. The spare propeller blade which he had been foresighted enough to bring along was quickly installed in place of the bent one and the plane was righted through the aid of a rude derrick made from the jungle trees.

But the broken wing-tip was the most serious damage: repairs on this would require skillful work.

While the men were busy stripping the damaged part of the wing, Joyce began coding Mrs. Bossmouth's message according to the old Secret Squadron Codograph. Actually there was little or no information in the message that required secrecy. It simply stated that Mrs. Bossmouth was safe, that she was delayed in finding her brother by the war, and that she would continue the search.

"She could have sent that in plain English," Joyce remarked to Chuck.

"That ought to confirm your suspicions that she's a spy. Of course, I sort of suspected her, too."

"You suspected only that she was charming," Joyce teased.

Captain Midnight, checking up during a recess in his

repair work on the plane, was informed that the message was ready to send.

"Good," he said. "We'll send it at once. If Mrs. Bosmouth is trying to trap us into revealing our code, she'll be out of luck. When she finds out she has failed, she may give herself away and then we'll have proof she's a spy."

"I hope she'll be listening," Joyce said wryly.

"She will be!" Captain Midnight declared, taking the message.

The transmitter in the plane was undamaged. He switched it on and put the coded message on the air. After the message was sent, Joyce began to wonder what ought to be done about Bill Madison. The castaway had not returned, and as night was beginning to fall, Captain Midnight began to express fear that Madison was lost.

"Too late to look for him now," Captain Midnight decided, glancing at his watch. "The sun is going down fast. When it gets dark here it gets dark in a hurry."

A few minutes later it was night. By lantern light in their tent, the Americans sat down to a supper prepared by Joyce. Hardly was the meal finished when Joyce looked out of the tent to see, moving under a tall tree near the plane, a human figure. The shadow crossed a patch of moonlight. It was a man.

"Captain Midnight!" Joyce whispered hoarsely. "Some man's out there."

Instantly Captain Midnight was on his feet.

"There he is again!" Joyce pointed.

As quiet as an Indian, Captain Midnight slipped out into the darkness. First he had signaled for Chuck to put out the light. In the tent all members of the party were perfect targets for a rifleman—should Captain Burly's murderous crew be peopling the darkness outside.

In spite of the darkness, Joyce saw Captain Midnight moving forward toward the creeping figure. In an instant Joyce, Chuck and Mudd were following. There was still light enough in the open to see shadows.

The figure, seeming to sense the approach of the four, hesitated a second, then began running toward the plane. Captain Midnight darted forward.

The marauder reached the plane, swung open the door, jumped inside and came out again. He turned to flee, but he misjudged Captain Midnight's speed. The Secret Squadron leader launched his body through the air and caught the stranger in a flying tackle about the knees. Both men went down in a heap.

A moment later Captain Midnight rose.

"Ikky!" he called.

"Yes, Cap'n."

"It's Bill Madison. He's knocked out. Come help me."

Joyce and Chuck followed Ikky to the side of the knocked-out man, who was breathing heavily.

"He was prowling around the plane again," Midnight said. "I wonder what he wanted. Ho! What's this?"

Captain Midnight reached down and picked something off the ground.

"Here's what he was after—this bag! Probably left it

in the plane when he tried to get away. That may explain why Captain Burly was so anxious for a peek into the plane, too. Lift Madison inside and then we can see what it is."

In the cabin of the plane, Joyce daubed the man's head with water to bring him back to consciousness. Captain Midnight opened the bag. He poured some small white objects into his hand. In the light of the cabin they glistened.

"Jee-manee!" Joyce gasped. "Pearls!"

"Yes, Joyce," Captain Midnight agreed. "There's a fortune here—some of the biggest pearls I've ever seen."

"I guess Madison wasn't so batty after all," Chuck said.

"Now I begin to understand. Captain Burly knew that Madison had these. That's why he wanted Madison."

Joyce realized, in some relief, that at least Burly and his men weren't after the Flying Wing. But she knew, too, that as long as Captain Midnight had the pearls the Americans were not done with Burly yet.

"We're pretty sure the Flying Wing isn't on this island," Joyce said. "Let's fly out of here with Mr. Madison and the pearls as soon as we can."

Madison's eyes were open. He started to struggle, but Chuck and Mudd held him. His eyes turned from side to side as he apparently searched for his pearls.

Back into the bag, apparently made of parachute silk, Captain Midnight poured the pearls and handed them to Madison.

"Yours, Madison," he said.

"You—tried—to—steal pearls!" Madison gasped. "You hit—me."

"Sorry about that," Captain Midnight said. "I didn't know who you were. I thought you were one of Captain Burly's men."

A wild look came into Madison's eyes.

"Must get away. Captain Burly will come. He will get pearls!" he said hoarsely.

"Oh, no, he won't," Captain Midnight assured the castaway. "Not while we're around."

"You will take them yourself!" Madison accused hysterically.

"Listen, Madison." Captain Midnight spoke sternly. "If we wanted your pearls we'd have them hidden by now. You were unconscious, so if we had desired them we could have tied a rock to you and dropped you in the lake."

Madison slowly began to understand. He shook his head, then nodded. His eyes looked appealingly to Captain Midnight.

"We're going to protect you from Captain Burly and we'll take you back to America!" Joyce repeated.

Madison smiled at her.

"You not take pearls? You—carry me—back—home?" Tears came into the man's eyes. "I think never see home again. Live—die on island!"

"That's all over now," Captain Midnight said. "We have a little work to finish here—then you'll go home with us."

"Look out for Pete Burly," Madison said. "Very dangerous. Has killed many natives."

"How did he find out about your pearls, Mr. Madison?" Joyce asked.

Madison shook his head. "I don't know. From native maybe. Many times has killed men to steal pearls."

"Where did you get the pearls?" demanded Captain Midnight.

The castaway's eyes were pitiful as they looked pleadingly into those of Captain Midnight. The pearls were precious possessions to him, though actually valueless on the island.

"When I crash here in a plane natives see me come from sky," he began. "They think me a god—give me pearls. Now natives are my friends. I learn to speak their language. They do anything I say."

To Joyce the explanation was simple and convincing, and she perceived that Captain Midnight believed it too.

"What'll we do with him, Cap'n?" Mudd asked.

"He'll be comfortable here in the plane," Captain Midnight decided. "You and Chuck go back to the tent to sleep. Joyce and I will take care of Madison tonight."

To act upon the plan, Chuck opened the cabin door. Instantly he stepped back inside and snapped off the light.

"What's the matter? What's up?" Captain Midnight asked tensely.

"Someone's outside!" Chuck said. "Burly, probably!"

Listening, Joyce heard the crack of a dead stick out-

side the plane. Someone was approaching from the jungle. Joyce caught sight of a stocky shadow moving across the clearing.

"It's Burly, all right!" she whispered.

Seizing Joyce by the arm, Captain Midnight dragged her down to the floor of the cockpit, where the others were crouched.

A pounding came on the door of the plane.

"Open up! I know you're there. Open up!" Captain Burly shouted.

"Keep away from this plane!" Captain Midnight ordered.

"If you know what's good fer you, you'll let me in!" Burly replied, but Joyce heard him move back from the plane.

Madison moaned in fear.

"What do you want, Burly?" Captain Midnight demanded.

"You know what I want," came the reply. "Bill Madison is in there! I heard his voice just now. Bring him out."

"Madison's hurt. He can't come out. He's staying here," Captain Midnight replied calmly.

"You're holdin' him," was Burly's sullen accusation. "I know what you want, but you ain't gonna get away with it. You can't fly that plane Madison wrecked for you and' I've got ya where I want ya. Hand over them pearls an' I'll let ya be. Otherwise, it's your finish."

Raising his arm, Captain Midnight pointed the auto-

matic pistol toward the door. The Secret Squadron leader's cool voice rang out:

"Get away from that door, Burly, or take the consequences!"

Burly's feet scraped back through the grass as the ring in Captain Midnight's voice warned him that bluffing would get him nowhere.

"Better be reasonable," Burly whined. "If ya are, ya can get away with a whole skin. Otherwise, ya won't get away at all. You're surrounded by my men—all we gotta do is open fire an' you'll be wiped out before ya can see us."

Madison's body twitched. He had been crouching on the floor with the others, but now he suddenly sprang to his feet like a tiger. Joyce tried to catch him, but he was too strong.

"Stay down, Madison!" Captain Midnight ordered.

But the ringing command had no effect on Madison. He lurched out through the cockpit door.

"Get him, Chuck!" Joyce cried.

Too late to catch Madison, Chuck scrambled after him. As Chuck launched himself through the cockpit door, the castaway was tugging at the cockpit hatch, which slid back as Chuck dived for his legs.

Madison sidestepped the tackle with remarkable agility, stuck his head through the hatch and shouted:

"Coo-gan-o! Coo-gan-o!"

As the strange cry echoed, Chuck recovered his balance and swung both arms around Madison and pulled him

back into the cockpit of the plane.

"Ahoy, in the airyplane!" Burly shouted. "What's goin' on in there?"

"Nothing that concerns you, Burly," Captain Midnight interjected.

"I'll give ya one minute to send Madison outa there," Burly shouted. "An' he better have them pearls with him."

Madison had quieted in the cockpit now and Joyce crept to his side.

"You mustn't try to leave," she whispered. "Burly will kill you, sure!"

"Do not worry," Madison said calmly. "My native friends are coming."

For a moment there was silence. Burly had dropped back away from the plane and he called from the edge of the jungle:

"Time's almost up. Send Madison out or else—"

Burly paused. Then he called again.

"Time's up! Get ready, boys! I'll count three, then fire. One—two—th—"

Suddenly a blood-curdling scream rang out in the forest, followed by a scattered volley of shots. Joyce, who rose to look out the window, saw several dark, shadowy forms running across the landing field. These were Captain Burly's men. Close behind them were stealthy forms of islanders, brought by Madison's strange cry.

Captain Burly had not been able to carry out his threat. He was too busy saving his own hide now.

"Gee, Mr. Madison! How can we ever thank you?" Joyce said fervently.

"I should thank *you*," Madison said. "I'll never be able to repay you for what you've done."

"The score's even, Bill," Captain Midnight said. "You'd better rest now. I suggest you and I take the cabin. Joyce can sleep in the cockpit. Chuck and Mudd can snooze in the workshop. We'd better stay together tonight."

But Madison did not go to sleep. He began to talk. Words forgotten in his years of exile now came back to him. He told them of fifteen lonely years on the island with only natives for companions. He told of his ill-fated trip across the ocean and the crash in a tropical storm on this island. Mrs. Sampson, wife of the man who financed the trip, was killed instantly, while Mr. Sampson lived only a few days. Both were buried by Madison in the jungle.

"But why did *you* fly here?" Madison asked his listeners at the conclusion of his story.

"We were searching for the Flying Wing—the strange airplane you told us of seeing. It's vitally important to the defense of our country that we find the lost Wing," Captain Midnight said.

"Defense of our country?" Madison said, wonderingly. "I don't understand. We went through the Great War with flying colors."

Captain Midnight shook his head.

"You forget, Bill," he said, "that you've been *out of*

touch with the world for fifteen years. You're thinking of things as they were when you left America. Everything's changed now. Enemies stealthily plotted against the peace of the world, became powerful, and struck. Your country's in the greatest peril of its history. Those here with me are members of the Secret Squadron—a selected group of pilots and agents banded together for defense of the United States."

"And you, who are called by the strange name of Captain Midnight, are chief?"

"That isn't my real name, but the one I am known by because of certain things that happened in the past," Captain Midnight explained. "But you must help us find the Flying Wing, and you can, if it landed on an island southwest of here. As soon as Ikky repairs our plane we'll fly over."

"How can you fly this great ship?" Madison asked in bewilderment. "So many instruments! I was so mystified when I tried to get it in the air—"

"I doubt if you could have flown very far—certainly you couldn't have reached the mainland," Captain Midnight said. "There's not enough fuel in the tanks."

"Do you need fuel?" Madison asked. "When I crashed, the fuel tanks didn't burst. Must be gas left in them still. There would be condensation in the tanks and the water on top of the gasoline would prevent it from evaporating."

"That might solve one of our problems," Captain Midnight said, "but even if it did, there'd be others. We'd

best turn in now and study our situation in the light of tomorrow."

Completely worn out, Joyce slept soundly till the morning. But she awakened early and prepared breakfast. After the morning meal, Mudd and Captain Midnight set to work once more on the plane. Madison, accompanied by Joyce and Chuck, hiked off to climb the volcano from which the castaway said he could point out the island on which the Flying Wing might have landed.

The trail was rough, through tangled undergrowth and over rough blocks of basalt rock. But Madison, who had climbed the peak many times, was well acquainted with the easiest route. At last, panting, they reached the top.

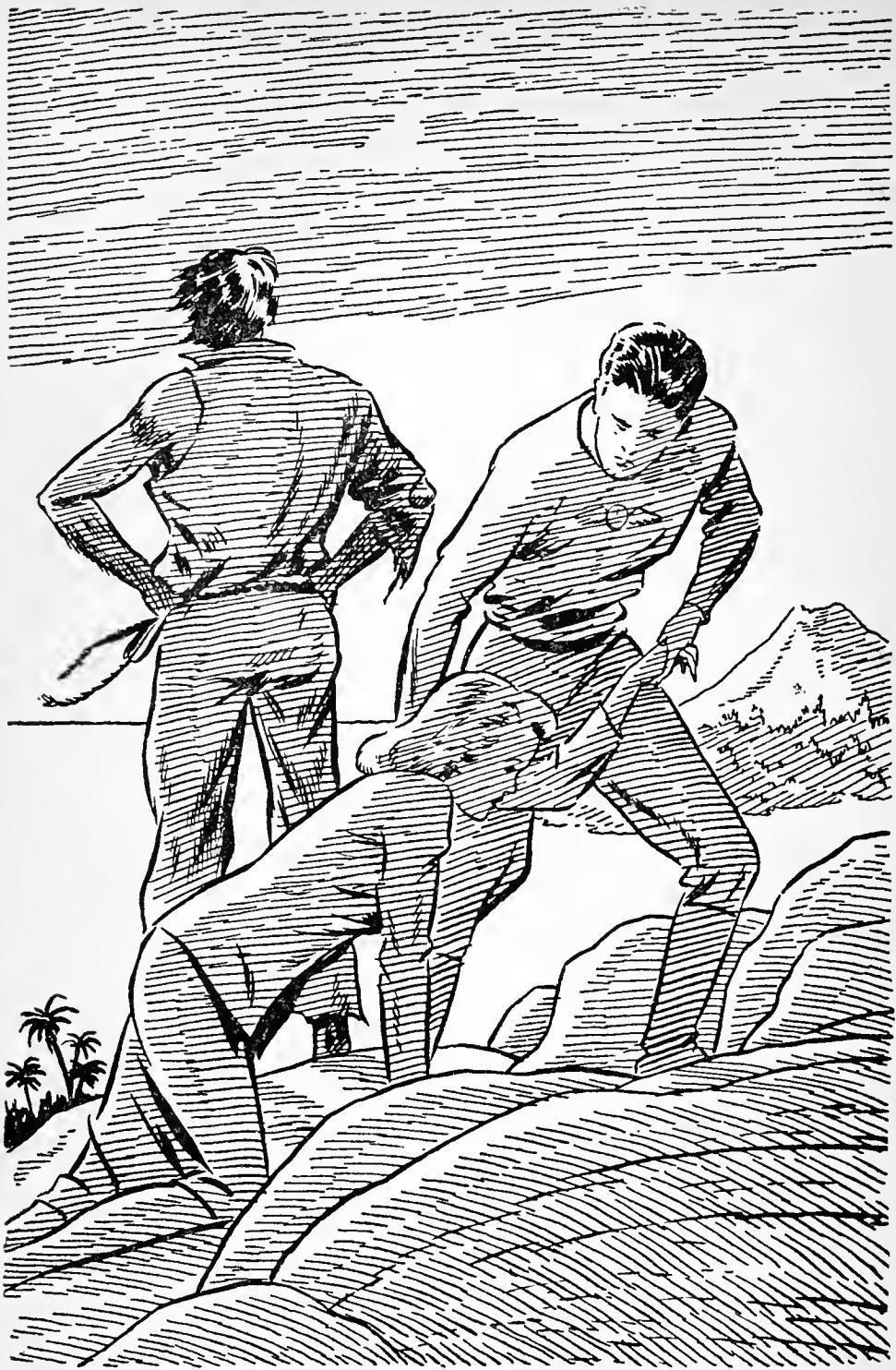
"Whew!" Joyce gasped. "Here we are!"

"A swell view!" Chuck said, looking out over the sea. "Look! There's an island!"

Faintly visible on the far horizon was another volcanic peak, appearing like a cloud on the distant edge where the sea met the sky.

"Yes," Madison said. "That's it! Many times while sitting here I've gazed at it, hoping a boat or a plane would appear."

Joyce mentally tried to put herself in the position of the pilot of the Flying Wing. With his motor failing, he would try to reach an inhabited place. This island was desolate and the other on the distant horizon offered hope. Of course he would try to make it. Whether he did or not—that would solve the mystery of the missing



At Last, Panting, They Reached the Top

Flying Wing.

The view of their own island from the peak was excellent. On the west side were the coves in which Mrs. Bosmouth's plane and Captain Burly's schooner were moored. On the far side was the inlet where Captain Midnight first had landed the Secret Squadron amphibian.

Directly below them were the island and the landing field on which Captain Midnight and Mudd could be seen laboring over the damaged plane.

Far to the south, near the extreme end of the island, was another cove. As Joyce looked toward it she saw something skimming close to the water. It was too large for a bird.

"Chuck!" Joyce said, her finger pointing.

"Great guns!" Chuck said. "A plane!"

Joyce saw the plane turn and for a moment she caught a glimpse of a tiny silhouette. It was not an ordinary plane, but a four-motored amphibian!

The Barracuda's plane!

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

THE CONSEQUENCES OF WRATH

Joyce Ryan's hope that Mrs. Bosmouth would be listening when Captain Midnight transmitted her message the night before was realized. Ever since Mrs. Bosmouth had entrusted her message to Chuck, she and her pilot, Carson, had taken turns listening in on the Secret Squadron wave-length.

When the message was transmitted, it was copied down by Mrs. Bosmouth herself, who worked until late in the night trying to decode it. The following morning she resumed her work and now she was beginning to make headway.

Carson watched her skeptically.

"How does anyone go about decoding a message when he doesn't have the key?" he asked.

"There are all kinds of codes, Jack," Carla explained. "Some are more difficult than others, but none are absolutely undecipherable—or at least that's what the experts say. But you always have to have some clue, or a large number of messages to study, before you can make any headway. Ordinarily a short message is difficult to decipher because there isn't enough to work on."

"Yeah? But how do you do it?"

"You take a code message and analyze it. You decide

what language it may be written in, and then decide which letter may be which. Where numbers are used—such as this, you decide that each number stands for a letter of the alphabet. Or at least that's the most likely solution."

"That's clear. Then what?" Carson asked.

"Well, what's the most common letter in the English alphabet?"

"E," Carson said without hesitation. "Then T—the use of the letters run just about as the keyboard of a linotype—E T A O I N S H R D L U, and so forth. I used to be a printer, that's how I happen to remember."

"That's the order for the English language," Carla said. "Of course, it'll vary somewhat in another language. For instance, Greek and Russian have special characters. So have Scandinavian tongues. Then if you were sending a message in Zulu you'd need two kinds of B's—implosive and explosive."

"Two kinds of B's?" Carson was mystified. "Where did you learn to speak Zulu?"

"I learned it in South Africa. If you were a printer in South Africa you'd be used to dropping a figure 6 in place of a B in some words—"

"Now don't tell me the Zulus have printers?"

"Some South African newspapers run columns of war news in Zulu language for the convenience of their native readers."

"Okay, I'll take your word for it. Let's get back to the problem of decoding."

"Well, Jack. To decode a message you're sure is in English, you decide that the number that occurs most often is E—and this will work out in most cases. So you write E wherever the commonest character occurs. Then you write T for the second most common letter and so on—soon words begin to appear. See?"

"You'd have to have a lot of messages to make that practical."

"That's right, as I said. And the code must always be the same. The Secret Squadron has a way of sending short messages and I suspect it changes its codes. This makes Secret Squadron messages hard to decipher. But I know the text of the message Midnight sent and I hope to work out a key from it."

"I hope you can outsmart Midnight," said Carson with a smile. "But it doesn't seem likely he'd fall for anything as simple as this."

"You're wrong, Jack," Carla declared. "Midnight did fall for it. He sent my message just as I wrote it. The first three words of my message were: 'Am safe. Delayed.' All three words have the letter A in them." Carla held up the code message she had intercepted. She pointed to the first three words. "Look. Here is a two-letter word followed by a four-letter word and next comes a seven-letter word."

"Say! Maybe you've got it!"

"And the code number is the same in each word where the letter A should be!"

"We've got it!" Jack cried. "I didn't think Midnight

would be so stupid."

Later in the morning Carla Rotan was surprised by a visit from the Barracuda, who landed in the lagoon in his four-motored plane.

"You shouldn't have come here, Your Excellency!" Carla declared. "What if Midnight should see you?"

"My respect for your ability and usefulness has received a severe jolt, my dear Carla!" the Barracuda assailed her sarcastically.

"Why do you say that? I have just obtained the key to Captain Midnigh's secret radio code."

"That is splendid, Carla!" the Barracuda sneered. "I also was able to decode Midnight's message. That is why I came here."

"How were you able to decipher it?" Carla asked unbelievingly.

"You are very clever, Carla, and Midnight is a stupid fool," the Barracuda said, angrily. "Such a stupid fool is he, that he has made a monkey out of you!"

"You can't talk to me like that!" Carla half screamed.

"I shall talk to you as I please," said the Barracuda, his voice growing harsh. "And you will listen. I understood your plan as I listened to the message. You gave Midnight a confidential communication to send and he accommodated you. But he sent the message in the old Secret Squadron code—one which he has discarded—the one I captured from him some time ago. We know no more about this new code than we did before!"

"I'll kill Midnight for this!" Carla said. Her face was

a twisted mask of fury.

"You'll do nothing further without orders from me, my dear Carla," the Barracuda commanded. "We are playing a game with tremendous stakes. The Flying Wing represents wealth and world power. Midnight is fighting against us with every weapon at his command. We must beat him, but killing him is not the way to do it."

"I'll make him suffer for this—and that girl Joyce as well. She was against me from the start."

"You must be careful!" the Barracuda warned. "Midnight is clever. He is laying a trap for you, Carla, and you must not fall into it."

"What shall I do?"

"You are expecting a reply to the message," the Barracuda said. "In due time you will go to Midnight and ask him if a reply has come. If it has—if he gives it to you—thank him. Do not give the slightest sign that you know he has outsmarted you. You must play the game cleverly. That is the only way we will win. Keep your friendly contacts and eventually the secret of the Flying Wing will be ours."

The Barracuda left Carla's plane and crossed on a little floating gangplank to his own machine. As he reached the plane, he glanced toward the shore. Quickly he sprang into his craft, which moved swiftly over the water for a take-off.

As Carla gazed shoreward, she saw the reason for the Barracuda's quick departure.

"Jack!" she called to her pilot. "Get the sub-machine gun!"

Moving toward the plane was a boat in which five men were riding.

"Stand back, out of sight," Carla ordered. "I'll talk to them. They must be from the schooner."

"I'll keep them covered."

A stocky, ugly man stood up as the boat came alongside.

"Ahoy the plane!" he called.

Carla appeared in the doorway and a gasp came from Captain Burly.

"Beggin' your pardon, ma'am," he stammered. "I didn't know there was a lady aboard. I want to talk to the cap'n of this plane."

"I'm in charge. You can talk to me."

Burly hesitated a second.

"Can I come aboard?"

"You may."

Carla stepped back and motioned to Jack, who slipped into the cockpit out of sight. The pilot still held the sub-machine gun in readiness, lest the sea captain make a false move.

Captain Burly whistled as he caught a good look at Carla in the cabin.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "I never expected to see anythin' purty like you down here."

"What did you expect to find?"

"What d'ya mean?"

"You came from the schooner, didn't you?"

"Yeah. I'm Pete Burly, the skipper."

"And I'm Mrs. F. W. Bosmouth. Now what do you want?"

"Are we alone?" Captain Burly asked cautiously.

"Of course not. In the cockpit is my pilot, Jack Carson. He has a machine gun aimed at your head."

"So that's it, eh?" Burly asked roughly.

"No affront intended, I assure you. Merely protection."

A gleam of admiration crept into Burly's eyes. "Say! I think you an' me'll get along all right. You can take care o' yourself!"

"Yes, I can take care of myself," Carla said impatiently.

"Well I need some help," Burly said. "There's a jungle flying field across the ridge. A fellow's landed there. He's got a boy an' a girl an' another fellow with him."

"Yes. That's Captain Midnight."

"Midnight! I've—I've heard of him. What's he doin' here?"

"I don't know," Carla lied.

"Whose plane was that—that just left?" Burly asked suspiciously.

"It belongs to the Barracuda."

Burly's eyes popped with excitement. "The Barracuda! I've heard o' him, too! Looks like I really tied into somepin'."

"I think you have."

"An' it don't look to me like you're here for your

health. What would you say to makin' some dough?"

Carla smiled pleasantly.

"Oh, money always comes in handy," she said. "Especially if it's in large sums. Please go on."

Briefly Captain Burly told of Bill Madison and the pearls. Carla listened eagerly.

"I am to get a share of the pearls if I help you lay hands on them—is that your proposition, Captain?" she asked. "And what plans have you made?"

"Supposin' me an' my men are landed by your plane on the jungle flyin' field. We could surprise 'em."

Carla smiled.

"Your proposition appeals to me, but I'm here for reasons of my own. I don't wish to antagonize Captain Midnight—*yet*. A little later, we can get together. Then I'll join forces with you."

"Okay, lady," Captain Burly said. "I got lots of time. But don't try to double-cross me, 'cause no one else has done it an' lived. When you're ready, let me know."

Carla watched Captain Burly board the boat. As the craft moved away she turned to Carson.

"Strange how much that man is like the Barracuda," she remarked acidly. "Both of them refuse to trust me"

"Of course you intend to get the pearls?" Carson asked.

"And the Flying Wing, too. Why should I share the rewards with the Barracuda and this uncouth sea captain?"

Meanwhile, as Pete Burly left the lagoon he looked

back at the schooner.

"You know, boys," he said, "I don't exactly trust that gal."

"Yeah, there's somethin' about her—" the mate began. "I remember a babe in the Fiji Islands—"

"Shut up! You fellers row me back to the schooner. We're goin' to visit the other half o' this island to call on the Barracuda."

A few hours later the schooner floated into the lagoon at the far end of the island. But the captain ordered it suddenly halted as a shot from a small cannon whizzed past its bow.

When the schooner had hove to, a small boat came from the amphibian plane. A few minutes later Captain Burly was ushered before the man known as the Barracuda.

"Who are you?" the international outlaw asked.

"I'm Pete Burly, skipper o' the schooner you just took a shot at."

"Why did you come here?"

"To see you. I think you an' me can do business."

"What makes you think that?"

"Because—" Burly paused to grin—"you are the Barracuda."

"Indeed? I suppose Carla told you that."

"Carla? Oh, you mean Mrs. Bosmouth. That's right. I thought I might do business with her, but she's givin' me the run-around. She's friendly with Cap'n Midnight—"

"You know about Captain Midnight, too?"

Briefly Burly again told the story of the pearls and asked the Barracuda's aid.

"Thought we might make a deal. I gotta get them pearls. How about a fifty-fifty split?" Burly bargained.

"Do you think I would haggle over some pearls? To me pearls are peanuts. I would not even look at them," the Barracuda sneered. "But we still can make a deal. If you and your men know how to use fists—*knives—GUNS!*"

"Now you're talkin' my language!" Burly observed with a boisterous laugh.

"I thought so," the Barracuda said suavely. "I am here on some very serious business which must be settled soon. Undoubtedly this means a struggle and there will be those who will not leave this South Sea island. They will be the ones who lose. I do not propose to be one of them. You help me and you can have the pearls."

"You don't want no part o' the pearls?"

"Not one of them. How about it?"

"It's a deal!"

Burly extended his hand, but the Barracuda did not take it. Captain Burly looked embarrassed, wiped his hand on his trouser leg and thrust it back in his pocket.

"I will let you know when I need you," the Barracuda said shortly.

After Captain Burly left, the Barracuda laughed softly.

"Stupid fool!" he said. "So he thinks I do not want the pearls!"



“You Don’t Want No Part of the Pearls?”

The strange sequence of events—the visit of the Barracuda to Mrs. Bossmouth's plane, the visit of Captain Burly to Mrs. Bossmouth and to the Barracuda, had been watched by eyes that the plotters did not realize were watching.

On top of the volcanic peak in the center of the isle, Joyce, Chuck and Bill Madison observed these visits and speculated on their meaning. Something was afoot, and each one realized that whatever it was boded ill for Captain Midnight and his band, stranded as they were by a wrecked plane in the center of the island.

To Joyce a plausible explanation occurred. Captain Burly was soliciting aid from Mrs. Bossmouth and the Barracuda to get the pearls from Madison. The others agreed that this might be the correct explanation, but why should Burly approach both unless Mrs. Bossmouth refused.

"She didn't refuse," Joyce guessed. "Maybe Captain Burly has more sense than you think. He probably saw that she wasn't to be trusted!"

"Aw Joyce!" Chuck said, growing red about the neck and ears. "Will you ever lay off that stuff?"

"Sure!" Joyce laughed. "I was only kidding, Chuck. But she's a woman we all have to watch out for. In fact, I think that in some ways Captain Burly is less despicable. At least he didn't try to disguise his intentions. He was after those pearls and he intended to get them. I'll bet that he thinks those pearls are rightfully his and that Bill Madison has been poaching on his territory."

"Those pearls are mine," Madison said, grimly. "They

were my only friends during the lonesome days I spent on the island."

Joyce turned to the aviator. "Do you have your pistol, Bill?"

"Sure, Joyce. But why—?"

"Never mind. Give it to me a second." She took the weapon which Bill handed to her unquestioningly. "Is it loaded?"

A suspicious look crept into Bill's eyes. "Are you goin' to steal my pearls, Joyce?"

Joyce without reply suddenly sprang to her feet and dashed down the side of the mountain. But instead of heading toward the jungle landing field, she ran in the other direction.

"Joyce!" Chuck shouted. "Where are you going? Come back here!"

The girl did not answer him.

The slope was not steep so she was able to make rapid progress without falling. Before Chuck and Madison realized what had happened the girl reached the edge of the jungle and plunged out of sight into the dense growth.

"Shouldn't we go after her?" Madison asked.

"We'd never find her," Chuck vowed, "especially if she didn't want us to. Great guns! What'll Captain Midnight say if she gets lost or hurt or something? And we haven't a plane now to search for her!"

"She has my gun," Madison remarked pointedly. "Do you suppose she is going to try anything reckless?"

Chuck was watching the spot where Joyce disappeared. "I know Joyce," he said. "She's hard to stop once she gets her mind set on something. I don't know what she plans to do, but she wouldn't have taken that gun if she didn't think she'd need it. You go and tell Captain Midnight. I'm going to hunt for her anyway."

With these parting words, Chuck set off in the direction Joyce had taken.

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

FROM AN UNEXPECTED QUARTER

Joyce Ryan was not running down the slope toward the jungle without a purpose. She had a definite plan which had occurred to her while she watched the mysterious sequence of events taking place on the far side of the island.

Alone in the dense tropical vegetation, Joyce began to wonder whether she had made the right move. She was armed, to be sure, but the men under the Barracuda were not only armed but relentless. She felt too that Mrs. Bosmouth might be just as inhuman and relentless as the Barracuda.

But Joyce did not turn back. If she were cautious, she might avoid both the Barracuda and Mrs. Bosmouth. Her objective was the hardened skipper of the schooner, Captain Pete Burly.

The jungle was dark and gloomy. But Joyce recalled with considerable relief that poisonous snakes and vicious animals are rare in South Sea islands, although there are poisonous plants to avoid.

At last the lashing of breakers came to her ears and she stepped from the shadowy depths onto the white coral sand of the beach. In the center of the lagoon lay the schooner at anchor. Joyce noted the name on the bow—

Flossie. She almost laughed. What a name for a ship manned by the cutthroat Captain Burly!

Catching a glimpse of men on the deck Joyce slipped quickly out of sight among the trees. The men were armed and Joyce, in her aviation togs, might easily be mistaken for a man and shot at. Her breath caught in her throat as she suddenly realized that these were the kind of men who would not hesitate to shoot at a woman either.

She had to talk to Captain Burly. There was something she had to say to him that offered a solution to all of the problems that now confronted the Secret Squadron. How could she get in touch with this cutthroat sea captain?

Swimming to the ship was possible, but out of the question, since Joyce realized she would have to have her pistol ready for instant use when she got there.

If only she could get Captain Burly ashore! But how?

A sudden idea came. She had once seen a motion picture made by Frank Buck in which the hunter had caught monkeys by preying on their curiosity. Captain Burly looked almost like a giant ape. Joyce wondered if his mental processes were also similar to a gorilla's.

Joyce picked up sticks and leaves and built a little mound. She applied a match and started a fire. The smoke drifted up through the trees.

Joyce quickly moved away, because this spot wasn't going to be healthy when Captain Burly's men saw the smoke.

Nor did Joyce misjudge her foes.

Crack! zin-n-n-ng! Whe-e-e!

A rifle spoke and a bullet ricocheted from a tree near the fire.

"Ahoy in the jungle! Step out on the beach where we can see you!" roared a voice from the deck of the *Flossie*.

Joyce inched to the fringe of the jungle. Captain Burly and several of his men, all armed with rifles, were leaning against the rail of the ship watching the smoke rise from the trees.

"Ahoy! Who's there?"

Joyce remained silent. Captain Burly's foghorn voice rolled again and again, threatening and demanding whoever lighted that fire to come out or make himself scarce.

Captain Burly was clearly perplexed when he received no answer. A consultation was held on the deck, and at last a boat was lowered from the side. Two men stood by the rail with rifles, covering the Captain and two sailors who were coming ashore in the boat.

The small boat was beached and Captain Burly advanced cautiously toward the place where the fire was burning. He held a pistol in his hand, while the other two men carried rifles. At the edge of the jungle they halted.

"See anything, Sam?" he asked the man to his right.

"Not a soul, Cap'n. Maybe a native lit th' fire an' scrammed when we shot."

"Maybe th' shot got 'im," suggested the second sailor.

"Uh. Maybe it did." Captain Burly took a step into the jungle and halted.

"See anything?" Sam asked.

"Not a sign. The fire's back a ways. Come on."

Followed by the two men, the captain began advancing slowly through the trees. After they passed Joyce, she stepped out from the thick brush into the trail right behind them.

"I've got a gun pointed at you," Joyce said in as low and compelling a tone as she could muster. "Keep facing the other way. The first man that turns will be shot."

"Leapin' cuttlefish!" Captain Burly exclaimed. "A woman! Honest, Mrs. Bosmouth, I wasn't tryin' to double-cross you when I went to see th' Barracuda."

"I'm not Mrs. Bosmouth," Joyce replied evenly. "Drop your guns."

The pistol fell from Captain Burly's hands. The sailors dropped their rifles.

"Now you can turn around," she told them. "But one false move and I'll shoot."

Joyce wondered if she would and checked herself. She mustn't even think about it lest what she was thinking would betray itself in her voice.

"Blow me down!" Captain Burly exclaimed. "It's th' gal that was with Cap'n Midnight!"

"Right! And Captain Midnight knows I'm here. If you try to start anything and if I don't come back, he'll chase you around the world and see that you are brought to justice."

Joyce was bluffing in saying that Captain Midnight knew where she was, but she had no doubt as to the

veracity of the rest of her statement.

"We wouldn't harm a pretty little gal like you," Captain Burly said, with an oily note in his voice. He lowered his hands a fraction of an inch.

"I *know* you wouldn't. I'm not giving you a chance. Put those hands higher."

"You got plenty of spunk, kid," the captain went on admiringly. "What do you want?"

"What claim have you got on Bill Madison's pearls?" Joyce asked pointedly.

Anger flushed Captain Burly's face.

"They are *my* pearls!" he growled. "I got the rights to fish on this island. I paid for it. He can't steal *my* pearls."

Joyce nodded. "That's just what I thought. But he got them and you ought to pay him something for getting them, if he turns the rest over to you. How much would you be willing to pay?"

"Will he give 'em to me, lady?"

"I think he will after I talk to him and if you'll keep your part of the bargain."

A crafty look came into Captain Burly's beady eyes. Joyce was certain that this man was not to be trusted.

"Listen," she said. "Captain Midnight isn't after those pearls. He doesn't want 'em. But there's something he does want that you can help him get."

"Yeah?" Captain Burly growled.

"If your hands are tired, you can fold them on top of your head," Joyce suggested, noting the sagging arms of the sailors. "Captain Midnight wants to use your ship

for about twenty-four hours."

"Oh, he does, does he? His airplane's too cracked up to get off the island, hey? Well, miss, you shouldn't have told me that, because I'm not going to let him use my ship. For all I care he can stay here an' rot, like Bill Madison!"

"What did you offer Mrs. Bosmouth to help you get the pearls?" Joyce asked, paying no attention to the threat.

"I was willin' to give her half, but she said to come back later," Captain Burly revealed, apparently ready to be communicative.

"And you didn't trust her, so you went to the Barracuda," Joyce guessed. "And what did you offer him?"

"Half, but he said I could keep the pearls if I helped him clean up on Midnight," Burly reported, grinning.

"And you accepted?" Joyce demanded.

"You bet I did. It's a cinch, too, now that I know Cap'n Midnight can't get away. You can't stand there with a gun on me forever an' you dasn't shoot me—"

Joyce squeezed the trigger. She hadn't intended to, but she saw Burly inching forward and she knew that she must. The bullet clipped a branch beside Burly's ear.

"Ow!" Burly's hands shot high in the air. "I didn't mean it, sister!"

"Ahoy! Cap'n Burly! Are you all right?" came a cry from the deck of the schooner.

"Call back. Tell them your gun went off by accident," Joyce ordered.

Captain Burly's foghorn voice answered without hesitation.

"Just an accident, boys!" he called. "Squeezed th' trigger too tight."

"Now let's get down to business," Joyce said. "Weren't you curious why the Barracuda offered to help you get the pearls for nothing?"

"'Twasn't for nothing," Burly replied. "We were to clean up on Midnight—he's got a grudge against him or somepin'."

"That grudge is not a personal one, except that the Barracuda hates all men who oppose him," Joyce said. "It's a war."

"A war? I thought Cap'n Midnight was an American."

"How long have you been out here in the South Seas, Captain Burly?"

"Nigh onto a year," the skipper replied. "We were headin' for Frisco after our stop here."

"I thought so. You don't know the United States is at war with the Japs!" Joyce exclaimed. "You haven't a radio on your schooner!"

"United States at war!" The words struck home with an impact.

"Great guns!" Sam said. "I gotta get to Frisco. I want to go in the Navy!"

"You're all Americans," Joyce said, "and yet you're willing to help an agent of Japan—a nation at war with America. You'd better think twice before you go back

to the mainland. You'd be shot as a spy and a traitor—”

“Honest, lady, we didn't know!” Captain Burly pleaded. “We was just after them pearls. They're ours. We live a different life than most people—we have to fight for what we get an' sometimes we don't fight exactly accordin' to rule, but we don't ask favors from them that fight us. But if them little yellow Japs is tryin' to stomp on Uncle Sam, they got to stomp us down too!”

“You bet,” Sam and his companion chorused.

“What do you want us to do, lady?” Captain Burly asked. “You don't need to point that gun at us no more. We're your podners now.”

Joyce wasn't taking any chances but she felt relieved.

“Send one of your men back to the schooner and have it wait for us. Then you and the other sailor come along with me to Captain Midnight's camp. I've got a plan that'll beat the Barracuda and his plan to help Japan, but we'll have to act swiftly. Unless I miss my guess, he's probably going to have some of his own men attack us in pretty short order. If he ever gets his hands on Captain Midnight the Barracuda'll torture him to death, trying to find out what he wants to know.”

“Joe, go back to the schooner. Tell the boys what's happened an' tell them if the Barracuda shows up to grab 'im.”

“He won't show up,” Joyce said. “He makes others come to him.”

“Can't I put my hands down?” the captain asked. “It ain't dignified fer a skipper—”

"No!" Joyce said emphatically. "I hope you realize why I can't let you!"

"I don't blame ye, lady! I don't blame ye a mite!"

A crashing sounded ahead in the jungle as Joe left the scene on his errand. Joyce tensed, hoping it was not one of the Barracuda's men. An instant later Chuck appeared, hatless and breathless. He saw Joyce holding a gun as she stood behind Captain Burly and Sam.

"Joyce! Are you all right? Whatever possessed you? Have these scoundrels—"

"They're not scoundrels," Joyce said. "A little on the shady side, maybe, but they're Americans and they've agreed to fight for Uncle Sam!"

Joyce and Captain Burly told their stories of the meeting.

"She's a swell gal, son," Captain Burly added with a wink as he finished. "'Tain't many like her I've seen an' I've sailed the seven seas. If I were you, I'd—"

"Captain Burly!" Joyce said. "Remember, I've still got a pistol pointed at you."

Captain Burly grinned at Chuck.

"Let's go back to the landing field," Chuck suggested. "I sent Madison to report to Captain Midnight and he'll be worried enough before you get there."

Captain Midnight and Bill Madison were on their way up the volcano when they met Joyce, Chuck and their prisoners. The situation was outlined to the captain, who regarded Joyce with serious eyes.

"You took a pretty big chance, Joyce," he commented.

"If Captain Burly hadn't been the right sort of a man underneath his gruff exterior, you might have gotten into serious trouble."

"I realized that, Captain Midnight," Joyce agreed. "But I saw something that even you overlooked. Captain Burly didn't act as though he was trying to steal the pearls from Madison—he acted as if the pearls were his. I knew if I could promise a reasonable settlement he would agree."

"I didn't know the pearls were his," Madison said. "Of course, I'll turn them over to him. They do mean quite a lot to me—they were my only companions. I felt that even if I was never saved I was rich—a millionaire. But my freedom's worth all the pearls in the world!"

"You can have half," Burly said. "That's the usual split. Those natives that gave 'em to you were workin' for me. I trade 'em supplies in exchange for pearls. But they thought you were a god an' tried to win your friendship with objects they thought were valuable."

"But what gave you the idea of trying to get Captain Burly on our side, Joyce?" Chuck asked.

"Our plane's broken and it'll take a long time to fix it," Joyce said. "We were helpless and the Barracuda's on this island. In a few days he'll find our hiding place and attack. He might decide to explore that other island and find the Flying Wing—it must be there! Once he lays his hands on the Wing, Uncle Sam will be in a pretty bad spot. If he lays his hands on us *we'll* be in a terrible spot."

"I begin to see," Chuck agreed.

"Captain Burly has a ship that can take us to the other island and help us destroy or recover the Flying Wing," Joyce pointed out. "That's all, I guess."

"Joyce is right." Captain Midnight said with a nod. "She has a shrewd head on her shoulders and plenty of nerve to back it up. If your ship is ready to sail, Captain Burly, we can slip away tonight under cover of darkness. I'll radio the Secret Squadron to pick us up after we locate the Flying Wing."

"What if the Barracuda attacks?" Chuck asked.

Captain Midnight addressed Captain Burly.

"The Barracuda probably will attack," the Secret Squadron commander stated flatly. "Not alone, but with support from his Swarm—about as vicious a bunch of fighters as you'd hope to meet—and they'll outnumber us. Are you and your men game to risk an air attack with only the arms you have on the ship, Captain Burly?"

The rough-and-ready old sea captain nodded vigorously.

"Me and my men are game for anything, I reckon, Captain Midnight."

"You might lose your schooner."

"There's enough pearls in Bill Madison's pocket to buy two or three schooners like the *Flossie*," Captain Burly said. "She's gettin' old an' her keel is covered with barnacles."

"I'll take back everything I thought about you, Captain Burly," Captain Midnight proposed, smiling.

Then the Secret Squadron leader hurried back to his flying field in the center of the island.

Ichabod Mudd received the news that Joyce was safe with exuberance. He listened attentively to the plan to escape from the island in the schooner, locate the Flying Wing and then get back home with Secret Squadron planes.

"It'll probably work," he said. "I was just wonderin' how I was goin' to explain to you that even if I fixed this plane so it could get to the other island, we'd never make it back to headquarters. You see, the wing's damaged and I've got to shorten the other wing to make it fly right. With shortened wings and very little fuel we'd never get back to our base—"

"You forget about the fuel I've got," Madison reminded him.

"No, I didn't forget, but I know it's not high octane gas like planes have to have nowadays to make a long flight," Mudd said. "It might work for awhile, but it wouldn't get us clear home."

"Then Captain Burly is our only chance to escape!" Joyce said.

Captain Midnight climbed into the cabin plane. Within a few seconds he was sending a message to Squadron headquarters ordering a flight of planes to meet him at the island southwest of his present location.

Even while Captain Midnight was sending, the drone of airplane motors sounded overhead. But it was not from a Squadron plane. It was a four-motored plane—the Bar-

racuda's ship.

Captain Midnight's hiding place had been discovered as he sent his vital message to headquarters.

The outlaw's plane swooped low over the landing field. The Barracuda could not help seeing the wrecked amphibian. A machine gun began chattering.

Captain Midnight emerged from his cabin.

"Run for it!" he cried. "Get into the jungle quickly!"

CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

FOR THE FINAL REPORT

Joyce saw machine-gun bullets kicking up the ground ahead of her as she darted toward the jungle. The Barracuda was attempting to cut off the retreat to the trees, but the Americans dodged to the left and scrambled to cover as the plane zoomed overhead.

Then came a crash behind them. The spot where the amphibian had stood a moment before was a mass of smoke and flame. A bomb, dropped from low altitude, had destroyed the plane.

"Hurry!" Captain Burly shouted. "Get to my schooner before that wall-eyed herring gets wind of what we're trying to do!"

Although Joyce's legs ached from her previous tramps through the jungle, she trudged on with the men, determined not to be a burden to them. The safety of all depended on reaching the schooner safely and getting it to sea before the Barracuda realized that Captain Burly had joined forces with the Secret Squadron.

Captain Burly and Captain Midnight led the way, with Madison, Chuck and Joyce following, and Ichabod Mudd and Sam bringing up the rear.

"Did headquarters get your message, Captain Midnight?" Chuck asked as they pushed on through the



Captain Burly and Captain Midnight Led the Way

heavy tropical growth.

"I didn't have time to get an acknowledgment of the call," Captain Midnight replied. "However, there's always someone listening on the Squadron wave-length at headquarters. The message undoubtedly was heard, if it got through."

"*If* it got through?" Joyce exclaimed. "What do you mean by that, Captain Midnight?"

"We might as well face the facts, Joyce," Captain Midnight explained. "I've noticed that during the past few days, when we communicated with headquarters, our battery was growing weaker and weaker. There's a chance that our message didn't get through at all—that the battery wasn't powerful enough to send out a strong message."

The seriousness of their situation struck home. They were in a lonely part of the South Seas. Escape was cut off, even though Captain Burly's schooner was available. The planes of the Barracuda could splinter the schooner and sink her with one or two well-placed bombs.

But their bridges had been burned behind them—the party had to go ahead. Within a short time they were nearing the sea. The sun already was sinking into the Pacific, so darkness would afford them an opportunity to sail the schooner away toward the island where they believed the Flying Wing had landed.

As they reached the beach, Captain Burly stepped out on the sand and sent his foghorn voice booming over the water.

"Ahoy, *Flossie!*" he called. "Send a boat to pick us up!"

A boat was lowered. It moved steadily in the dusk toward the Americans on shore. Joyce noted that the boat rode awkwardly on the waves and once almost capsized.

"Hardaport! *Hardaport!*" bawled Captain Burly. "Who's pullin' th' portside oar? What's th' matter with you—are you sick?"

No answer came from the boat.

The craft scraped the beach and the starboard oarsmen leaped to his feet and swung around facing the Americans. In his hands he held a sub-machine gun.

It wasn't one of Captain Burly's sailors. It was Jack Carson, the pilot—and the port oarsman was not a man, but Mrs. Bosmouth!

"So you thought you could put one over on me, did you, Captain Burly!" Mrs. Bosmouth said. "You might be able to fool the Barracuda, but not me!"

"What have you done to my crew?" the sea captain asked.

"Don't worry about your precious rascals," Mrs. Bosmouth said. "They're tied below deck—all whole, except for a few sore heads where Jack had to use force."

"What do you want?" Captain Midnight demanded.

"Ah, it is the mysterious Secret Squadron leader, Captain Midnight!" the woman replied scornfully. "You are not quite such a hero now, to be captured by a woman! I'll tell you what I want, Captain Midnight! I want to know where the Flying Wing is! I want the pearls that

Bill Madison carries! If you give these to me, I may change my mind about killing you. I might set you down on some little Pacific island, far away from the war that is going on—”

Joyce's heart sank. After all of their planning, they had forgotten the possibility of Mrs. Bosmouth's interference.

“So you're actually a spy, Mrs. Bosmouth!” Chuck said. “I was the only one who believed your story—”

“Poor boy!” she interrupted in a belittling tone. “Perhaps I shall be more merciful toward you than toward the others. I am not a spy, but a patriot, Chuck Ramsay. I am Carla Rotan! Although I look much like a white woman, there is Asiatic blood in my veins. This blood is supreme—it shall conquer the western nations and rule the world!”

“Carla Rotan!” Captain Midnight said. “I should have known you! *Shanghai!*”

“Yes, *Shanghai!*” Carla replied. “That is only one of my long list of accomplishments, Captain Midnight. To-day I shall prove to my nation that I am more valuable than the notorious Barracuda! I shall be rewarded and he will come home empty-handed. Now where is the Flying Wing?”

Joyce felt weak and tired. Suddenly she remembered something.

The gun she had acquired earlier in the day still was in the pocket of her jacket. It was loaded. Did she dare?

Joyce like the others, was standing in a line, covered by Jack Carson's sub-machine gun. The gun could be

swung across the line, mowing all seven Americans down before the clock ticked twice.

"Are you going to answer me?" Carla demanded. "It is a shame that these young people, Joyce and Chuck, should die, Captain Midnight."

Grim lines darkened Captain Midnight's face. He eyed Joyce.

"Don't tell." Joyce pleaded.

"No!" Chuck echoed. "Don't tell!"

"Joyce, step forward!" Carla's voice was cold and hard. Joyce felt her feet moving under her.

"You will go first," Carla said coldly. "I've hated you since I first saw you. I have a feeling that you hindered my efforts in learning the secret of the Flying Wing. Therefore you shall die *now!*"

Joyce wished she could get to her pistol. But Carson was pointing the machine gun directly at her now. Joyce didn't dare move a finger.

"Don't, Carla!" Captain Midnight pleaded.

"Don't tell!" Joyce said. "She'd kill us anyway!"

"Is there anything you'd like to say?" Carla asked. "I can afford a little generosity."

Joyce looked squarely at Carla. The sun was going down into the sea. It was the end of daylight—forever.

"I—I wonder if I could—could powder my nose!" Joyce said.

The request came with the effect of a thunderbolt. It seemed to bowl Carla over.

"Powder your nose?" Carla stared at Joyce. "You face

death and ask permission to powder your nose."

"You are a woman, Mrs. Bosmouth—or whatever your name is—" Joyce said. "Surely you understand!"

Carla Rotan the notorious spy stared at the girl.

"Yes," she agreed, yielding. "I think I do!"

Joyce had counted on Carla reacting as she did. The permission to powder her nose was not what Joyce would have asked if she had really expected to die. Joyce was making a desperate gamble. But Joyce understood in some degree the emotional mechanism that made Carla Rotan, the woman, behave as she did.

Carla Rotan was beautiful, there was no denying that. But she was neither Oriental nor Western. She was denied the security of belonging to any nation. As a result she had become an enemy of all peoples. She hated Americans; she hated the races of the Orient. But she was beautiful and this had given her a weapon to appease her hatred. This beauty was more precious than anything Carla Rotan had. Everything would be sacrificed before she would sacrifice her beauty.

Joyce, too, was a beautiful girl. She was clean-cut, young, and the picture of health. Joyce was glad she was pretty, but she knew most worth-while things cannot be obtained by beauty alone. Powdering her nose did not represent the same thing to Joyce that it represented to Carla Rotan. To Carla, meeting death with a shiny nose would have been hideous. To Joyce death was death, whether her nose shone or not.

"Perhaps I misjudged you, Joyce Ryan," Carla spoke.

"Perhaps we should have been friends. We see things the same way. By all means, powder your nose."

Joyce's hand slipped into the pocket of her jacket. She touched the cold metal of the gun. Joyce prayed fervently that she would not miss.

A scream rent the air. Joyce was not aware for minutes afterward that she herself had emitted that scream.

Chuck and Captain Midnight seemed to realize what Joyce was doing, although both were acting instinctively. As Joyce fired, both of them plunged forward.

As she pulled the trigger, Joyce had closed her eyes. She opened them instantly to discover that she had missed. Jack Carson's finger was pulling the trigger of the sub-machine gun.

But Chuck had lunged forward like a football lineman. His back caught Joyce and knocked her aside, out of the path of the bullets that were chewing up the sand on the beach.

Then Captain Midnight struck Jack Carson. It was no sportsman-like football punch that Captain Midnight landed either. Captain Midnight had a life to save and he used his head, his fists and his feet to bowl Carson to the ground, knock him unconscious and seize the gun.

Gaspings for the wind knocked from her body by Chuck's "clip," Joyce looked up. In that split second the whole situation was under control. Captain Burly was holding the screaming, scratching and kicking Carla Rotan, while Captain Midnight was in possession of the sub-machine gun. Jack Carson lay unconscious on the

ground.

Joyce sat up to rub her arms and legs. She was almost surprised to find that she wasn't hurt, except for the loss of breath. Chuck was grinning at her and proudly pointing to his trouser-leg. A bullet had ripped through the cloth without touching him!

"I can tell about that the rest of my life!" Chuck said.

"Oh, Chuck!" Joyce said, laughing almost hysterically. "Sometimes you can be such a fool!" Joyce paused and looked at Carla Rotan, who had ceased her struggles now. "But some women can be bigger fools."

"All right," Captain Midnight said. "Ikky, you and Sam load Carson in the boat. We've got to get to the schooner right away. It'll be dark in a few minutes and we can start out on our trip to the other island."

The tropical night fell suddenly, and a few minutes later the foul-bottomed schooner *Flossie* edged out of the lagoon and sailed swiftly to the southwest.

"We might have tried to take Carla's plane," Captain Midnight pointed out, "but I'm afraid it would have been risky. The Barracuda may have spies watching her and we haven't enough arms to run up against his men."

"This'll be safer, Cap'n Midnight," Captain Burly said. "The Barracuda won't suspect that I'm takin' ye over to the other island."

Captain Midnight set to work at once. Whether the Barracuda suspected Burly or not he was taking no chances. He found eight rifles below, and he lashed them to a framework which was mounted on a capstan so

that the guns could be swung in any direction. Then he adjusted the frame so that it could be tilted to fire directly overhead or at an angle. A long metal rod pushed through the trigger guards made it possible to fire all of the guns simultaneously.

"This is a sort of anti-aircraft gun," Captain Midnight explained. "It probably won't be very effective, but it's the best we have."

"It might be better than you think, Cap'n," Ikky pointed out. "It could do quite a bit of damage to a low-flying plane and planes'll have to fly low to bomb a ship the size of the *Flossie!*"

It was early morning and the sun was rising as the schooner slipped into a small lagoon on the southwest island.

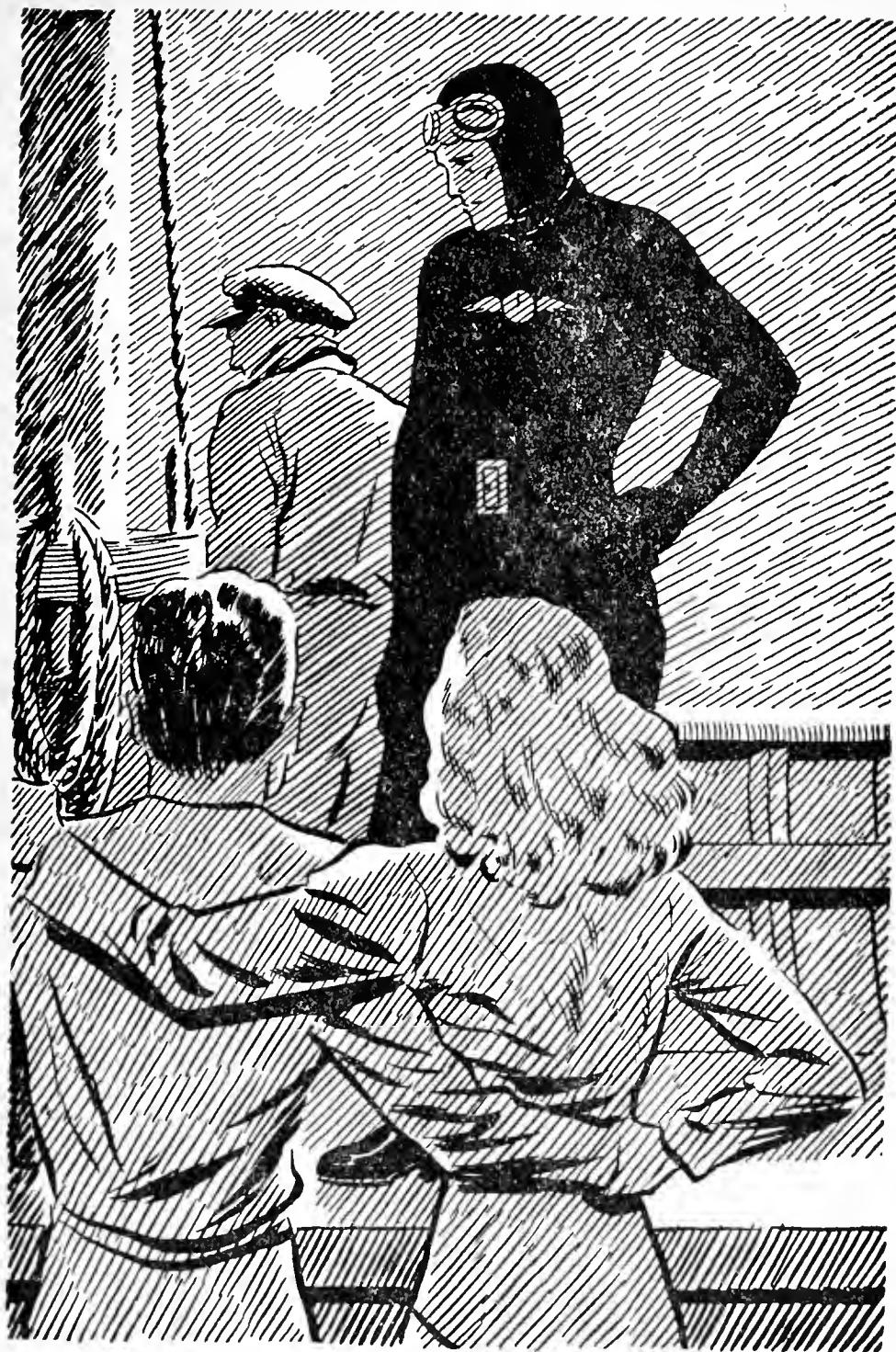
Joyce was standing on deck with Chuck and Captain Midnight as the anchor was dropped.

"Look, Captain!" she said, pointing to some trees with broken tops along the shore. "I know what that means this time!"

The trees were broken the same way that others had been splintered by Bill Madison's plane.

"The Flying Wing!" Chuck exclaimed.

Through an open space they saw what they were certain was the missing plane. It was concealed from view of planes overhead by overhanging limbs and foliage. Planes might have flown over the island indefinitely without sighting the wreckage, but the remnants of the Wing were quickly spotted by those aboard the schooner.



The Schooner Sailed to the Southwest

"Lower a boat, Burly," Captain Midnight said. "We'll go ashore and destroy it now."

Captain Burly was gazing off to the north.

"I don't know if we'll make it or not," he said.

Faintly to the ears of those on deck came the faint hum of airplane motors. The Barracuda had discovered the schooner's departure and was searching for the *Flossie*.

The boat was lowered. Chuck, Joyce, the two prisoners and two of the crew were to make the first boat load. Captain Midnight, Captain Burly, Mudd, Madison and the other members of the crew would come ashore in a second boat as soon as the others landed.

It was fully daylight now and the sailors rowed furiously to get ashore before they were spotted by the planes. The aircraft could not be seen yet, but they would soon appear. Possibly the craft were flying in circles trying to spot the schooner.

The boat was beached and the party landed.

"Chuck!" Joyce cried, pointing upward.

Sailing high above the island was the Barracuda's four-motored amphibian. It seemed to spot the schooner just as Joyce cried out. It went into a dive, straight at the schooner.

As it came low it leveled its flight. A swish, splash and boom shattered the island stillness. A flash of flame leaped up from the shallow water of the lagoon.

But the Barracuda's first bomb had fallen short.

Joyce caught a glimpse of Captain Burly and Madison getting the boat lowered while Captain Midnight and

Ikky manned their primitive anti-aircraft gun.

The Barracuda's ship was coming back, lower this time, ready to unloose another bomb.

Joyce heard more motors and above the tree-tops appeared many hawk-winged planes. *The Barracuda Swarm!*

These planes were diving, too. The schooner would be blasted to bits!

Then suddenly a new, higher note sounded among the airplane motors. Out of the clouds another flight of planes was diving. But these were not enemy aircraft.

"The Secret Squadron!" Joyce cried with glee.

The Barracuda Swarm was unable to finish its dive on the schooner. The pilots had to defend themselves against the aerial defenders. The sky overhead was black with planes.

But the Barracuda did not alter his course from his first objective. He was flying toward the schooner, determined to wipe out Captain Midnight with a bomb.

Joyce saw Captain Midnight on the deck—waiting.

The Barracuda's plane seemed only a few feet above the schooner's mast. It was taking point-blank aim before releasing more bombs.

Suddenly there was a ruffling crash from the deck of the schooner. Flame leaped from the muzzles of eight rifles fired simultaneously.

The Barracuda's ship seemed enveloped in flame for an instant. A roar shook the whole bay.

The rifle bullets had struck the bomb cargo of the

Barracuda's plane! The deadly explosive intended for Captain Midnight had shattered the ship of the death-dealing foe himself.

Captain Midnight and Ikky scrambled into the boat which now had been lowered to the sea. Other enemy craft had dropped bombs near by now and it was only a question of time before a direct hit would sink the old schooner. But the ship had done its duty. Besides, Bill Madison's pearls would buy Captain Burly another schooner with plenty to spare for the captain's crew and Madison.

While the American and enemy planes battled overhead, Captain Midnight beached the boat and darted into the trees. An instant later smoke curled up from the jungle, marking the pyre of the Flying Wing. No enemy would discover its secret now.

Captain Midnight returned, reporting that the pilot had died in the crash and the secret was safe.

The Secret Squadron planes now had the upper hand in the sky battle. Half a dozen of the Barracuda's planes had been downed and the others now were trying to escape the deadly aim of the Americans. Suddenly the battle was over. A handful of the Barracuda Swarm was fleeing.

Of the Secret Squadron, there had been only one plane lost.

Now some of the Secret Squadron planes were landing on the beach of the little island. There would be enough of them to carry everyone back to an American

base, where the spies would be turned over to authorities and the others would be safe from attack.

"Come on," Chuck said to Joyce. "I'll race you to the nearest Secret Squadron plane."







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